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## **Who, being loved, is poor? : material and media dimensions of weddings**

Edited by: Höpflinger, Anna-Katharina ; Mäder, Marie-Therese

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Anna-Katharina Höpflinger and Marie-Therese Mäder (eds.)

**“Who, Being Loved, Is Poor?”**  
**Material and Media Dimensions of Weddings**

**SCHÜREN**

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# JRFM

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Institut für Fundamentaltheologie / JRFM  
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e-mail: [jrfm@uni-graz.at](mailto:jrfm@uni-graz.at)  
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**71<sup>st</sup> Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland, 1–11 August 2018**

Anna-Katharina Höpflinger and Marie-Therese Mäder

## “What God Has Joined Together ...” Editorial



Fig. 1: Longshot from the air shows spectators lining the streets to celebrate the just-married couple (PBS, News Hour, 21 May 2018, 01:34:21).<sup>1</sup>

On 19 May 2018 the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle flooded the television channels. Millions of spectators around the globe watched the event on screens and more than 100,000 people lined the streets of Windsor, England, to see the newly wed couple (fig.1).<sup>2</sup>

The religious ceremony formed the center of the festivities. It took place in St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, attended by 600 invited guests. While this recent example is extraordinary in terms of public interest and financial cost, traits of this event can also be found in less grand ceremonies held by those of more limited economic means.

Marriage can be understood as a rite of passage that marks a fundamental transformation in a person's life, legally, politically, and economically, and often

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j51O4lf232w> [accessed 29 June 2018].

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/may/19/a-moment-in-history-royal-wedding-thrills-visitors-from-far-and-wide> [accessed 29 June 2018].



in that person's self-conception, as an individual and in terms of his or her place in society.<sup>3</sup> This transformation combines and blurs various themes. We focus here on the following aspects, which are integral to the articles in this issue: the private and the public, tradition and innovation, the collective and the individual. The media play a crucial role in shaping all of these categories and their relationship. Finally, we consider the connections between marriage and religion, for a wedding is not *per se* religious. In the contemporary European context in particular, a wedding can take the form simply of the signing of a socio-legal contract. But nevertheless – or perhaps exactly therefore – marriages are often staged ritualistically and linked to religious symbols, worldviews, and norms.

## BETWEEN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC

A wedding is often carried out in public, with its audience able to testify to the act or, more specifically in some instances, to the vows made and the signing of the contract. But some dimensions of wedding practices take place in private spaces or in spaces to which access is restricted to chosen guests. We could call these spaces semi-private or, on the flip-side, semi-public, for public and private spaces are by no means dichotomic and strictly separated realms, as we will argue in the case of the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

Swantje Lingenberg considers the distinction between private and public as related to power relations and not an *a priori* attribute. Specific instances, as Lingenberg points out, can define specific distinctions between the public and the private.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the two realms are permeable, as the example of the royal wedding will show, in that the event was broadcast by diverse media formats, including photographs, television shows, radio programs, and smartphones. To speak of semi-private and semi-public spaces highlights the overlap of the two spheres. Media influence the boundaries of these spheres, for they shape the representation and reception practices not only of a royal wedding but also of ordinary people as they tie the knot in hope of a life-long relationship. Thus, for example, at not-royal weddings too, the wedding party gathers for pictures to be taken, the photographer needs to catch every important moment during the wedding day (fig. 2), and photograph books and video films are produced to remember the event. A whole profession, the wedding photogra-

3 Hirsch, 2008, 49–80. Edith Turner and Pamela R. Frese describe the rite of passage of a marriage as follows: "A rite of passage is a vehicle for moving an individual or a group of individuals from one way of being to another through a series of culturally recognized stages. A marriage ceremony moves the bride and groom from being unmarried to being husband and wife. Just as the definition of what marriage is will vary cross-culturally, so will the manner in which the union of marriage is created and recognized. The rite of passage may extend over a long period of time and include great finery and complex symbolism, or there may be no traditional ceremony at all, simply an action conducted in public view." (Turner/Frese, 2005, 5726).

4 Lingenberg 2015, 176–178.



Fig. 2: The photographers need to catch every important moment during the wedding. Picture by Yves Müller, Zurich 2017.

pher, is founded on the desire to make this day unforgettable, even though for more than half the protagonists the contracts they seal come to an end before “death do them part”.

The television transmission of the royal wedding showed moments of the event taking place in (semi-)private and (semi-)public spaces. We might assume that the invited guests had privileged access to spaces that the spectators in the street could not enter. The picture of the crowds lining the streets proves, however, that such is not entirely the case. The onlookers are stretching out their arms with their smartphones in their hands to catch the moment when the wedding couple drives by in their coach (fig. 3). The smartphone had a dual role: in addition to taking and holding its own image of the famous couple, it also enabled the spectators to watch the television coverage of the wedding. The photograph taken with a smartphone is evidence that its owner has “met” the couple in person and in a clearly public space, that they occupied a single location at a single time. The ability to watch the transmission of the church service and the ceremony also enabled a privileged viewing of some moments, as we will show.





Fig. 3: On the right spectators are extending their arms, smartphones in hand, to catch the moment of the couple's appearance (BBC News, Royal Wedding, Live from Windsor, 19 May 2018, 00:45:56).<sup>5</sup>

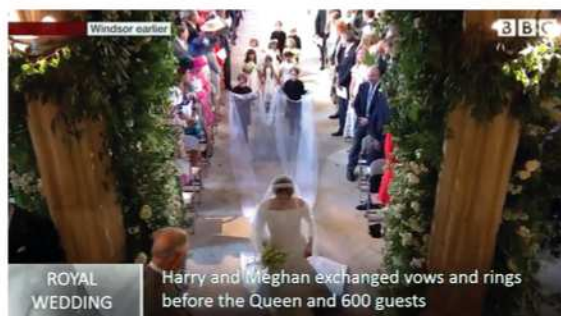


Fig. 4: From a high angle, the camera shows the bride and the flower bearers carrying her veil. The view underlines the nature of her walk to the altar, in part unaccompanied, and the threshold between the two spaces occupied by the invited guests: the first part as she walks down the aisle seen by a broader audience, and thus a semi-public space, and the second part seen by members of the royal family, the clergy, the choir, and few chosen guests, and thus a semi-private space (BBC News, Royal Wedding, Live from Windsor, 19 May 2018, 00:04:20).<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 5: As the bride's father was absent, Prince Charles escorted Markle down the aisle and up to the altar, almost as he were granting her official access to this semi-private space of a most privileged family (BBC News, Royal Wedding, Live from Windsor, 19 May 2018, 00:04:45).<sup>7</sup>

The television coverage of the ceremony at St. George's Chapel enabled the viewing of semi-private spaces. The camera view provided privileged access to central moments of the ritual, for example when the bride entered the chapel by herself (fig. 4), when Prince Charles, her future father-in-law, escorted Markle from half way down the main aisle to the altar (fig. 5), or when vows were made during the ceremony within the church (fig. 6).

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPJ2\\_nqjNbs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPJ2_nqjNbs) [accessed 29 June 2018].

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPJ2\\_nqjNbs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPJ2_nqjNbs) [accessed 29 June 2018].

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPJ2\\_nqjNbs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPJ2_nqjNbs) [accessed 29 June 2018].

Fig. 6: The saying of the vows was filmed with medium close-ups of the couple and reverse-shots showing the bride or the groom in close-up (Washington Post, Watch Live: The Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, 19 May 2018, 08:22:07).<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 7: Prince Harry puts the ring on Markle's finger. Her right hand touches his left hand, as if she is calming him. The scene seems staged in its detail, rehearsed and perfectly performed (Washington Post, Watch Live: The Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, 19 May 2018, 08:24:12).



Fig. 8: One of the most anticipated moments of the wedding was the kiss of the newly married couple, not their first kiss but their first married kiss. The excitement around this tradition shows the performative power of the ritual and its customs (Washington Post, Watch Live: The Royal Wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, 19 May 2018, 08:52:12).



The exchange of rings, with bride and groom each putting a ring on the finger of the other, could only be seen by those in very advantaged positions within the church, and even then only the couple themselves could view the act as closely as the detail shot by the television coverage that caught this moment for its viewers. This perspective was in effect that of a third but invisible person within the space who could even see all the details of the bride and groom's hands (fig. 7). Additionally, when the newlywed couple presented themselves

<sup>8</sup> Fig. 6–8: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nbFfetlsks> [accessed 29 June 2018].



to the public invited to gather just outside the church and kissed each other (fig. 8), not even family members with front-row places within the church could see the episode from in front (part of the core royal family stood behind the couple). From amongst those actually present, only those invited to be immediately outside the church, many of them equipped with smartphones to photograph the special moment, could enjoy this public moment live.

The television coverage simultaneously disseminated this long-expected moment to people viewing their screens in the streets and at home. For once *they* were the privileged ones – a cellist entertained the guests in St. James’s Chapel until the bridal couple left the church area in their coach, greeting the people gathered in the streets. The nominally privileged guests in the church were unable to enjoy this moment, with no one daring to use a smartphone to watch the live transmission.

In the case of the wedding of Prince Harry and Markle, the media brought new complexity to the representation and reception of this ritual as well as to its production process. The public and private spaces overlapped, allowing a diversity of perspectives that generated and multiplied a complex narrative, which thereby became about more than just one single event in space and time. Lingenberg proposes that public and private spaces are defined by practices accomplished by people.<sup>9</sup> This example demonstrates that the media are part of such practices. In entering private spaces, media practices turn them into public spaces that are then in turn consumed in private spaces, for example from a screen at home or in the streets.

## BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

The royal wedding of Markle and Prince Harry was received in various media that included television, internet journals, and blogs as an important and novel link between the tradition of the British royal family and an innovative integration of African American culture.<sup>10</sup> For example, the Right Reverend Michael B. Curry, who gave the sermon, quoted Martin Luther King Jr., and the Kingdom Gospel Choir, a gospel choir performed the song “Stand by me” (fig. 9), firstly released in 1961 by the American singer-songwriter Ben E. King. This royal wedding thus is a good example of the interaction of tradition and innovation: it was traditional in form but included creative, even unexpected, ritual aspects. This combination is increasingly common for today’s Western (understood culturally, not geographically) not-royal weddings. A research project undertaken by anthropologist Hilde Schäffler has shown that while contemporary weddings in

<sup>9</sup> Lingenberg 2015, 177.

<sup>10</sup> Even Wikipedia mentions this link; see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wedding\\_of\\_Prince\\_Harry\\_and\\_Meghan\\_Markle#Reactions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wedding_of_Prince_Harry_and_Meghan_Markle#Reactions) [accessed 11 July 2018].

Fig. 9: Kingdom Gospel Choir performs at the wedding of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry (PBS, News Hour, 21 May 2018, 00:38:50).<sup>11</sup>



Austria (and, we would argue, also in the rest of Europe) are designed by paid wedding planners as idealistic and individualistic rituals, the sequence that is followed in the preparation and the ritual itself is highly standardized, although open to individual adaptations.<sup>12</sup>

Tradition and innovation are manifoldly intertwined. Here we understand tradition as essentially something constructed and passed down from one generation to the next (the Latin *traditio* means transmission) and innovation as something thought of as new to a specific context. In defining tradition and innovation, we stress that the concepts are fluid. Such measurement of time is processual and messy: innovative elements can also be old, and what is at one point innovative can subsequently become traditional. One example of such change – to come back to weddings – is the white bridal gown. Before the 19th century wedding gowns for the rich were mostly colourful, those for the poorer often black (fig. 10). Both groups wore their Sunday best, clothes that were not worn only for the wedding.<sup>13</sup> The white bridal dress was made popular by Queen Victoria,<sup>14</sup> who wore a white-lace court dress at her wedding to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1840. That decision was widely debated by her contemporaries, and while not exceptional, it was unusual. Although the queen's choice in bridal gown subsequently became fashionable, we still commonly find coloured and black wedding dresses worn up until the 1940s (and even later). Today a black bridal gown is seen as innovative and can become a topic for discussion.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j51O4lf232w> [accessed 29 June 2018].

<sup>12</sup> Schäffler 2012, 71–101.

<sup>13</sup> Beautiful examples of such dresses can be found in Wiswe 1990.

<sup>14</sup> See Schäffler 2012, 75 (misleadingly Schäffler speaks of “Princess Victoria”, but Victoria was already queen by the time of her wedding; she reigned from 1837 until her death in 1901).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, a clip from the TV reality soap *Say Yes to the Dress* where the bride wants a black dress, but her mother hates it: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyKxxZelU\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyKxxZelU_w) [accessed 3 August 2018].



Fig. 10: Black bridal-gowns were normal in the 19th and early 20th centuries. We see here a rural wedding in Grisons, Switzerland, from the 1940s. The pastor walks in front, followed by the bride and groom with a flower girl, and then the guests. Private collection: Höpflinger.

We have observed in relation to the categorization of the private and the public that the media play a crucial role, and their role is also vital for the interaction of tradition and innovation. Traditions are formed through media communication, but at the same time media can make innovation possible, sometimes even defining something as innovative although it is not as novel as people might think. Again the white wedding dress is a good example: after Queen Victoria's wedding, fashion magazines (popular culture media) began to promote white bride-dresses, but it would be another 100 years before the white wedding gown was accepted all over Europe and in the USA.<sup>16</sup> Today TV series, films, or the internet tell their consumers that the coloured or black wedding dress is innovative, and yet it was common up until the 20th century.

## BETWEEN THE COLLECTIVE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Alongside this discussion of the categories of public and private and of tradition and innovation, we wish also to raise the issue of interaction between collective expectations and individual actions and worldviews. A wedding, even a royal

<sup>16</sup> For differences between the image of the ideal bride promoted by fashion magazines and the dresses of brides in photographs see Wiswe 1990.



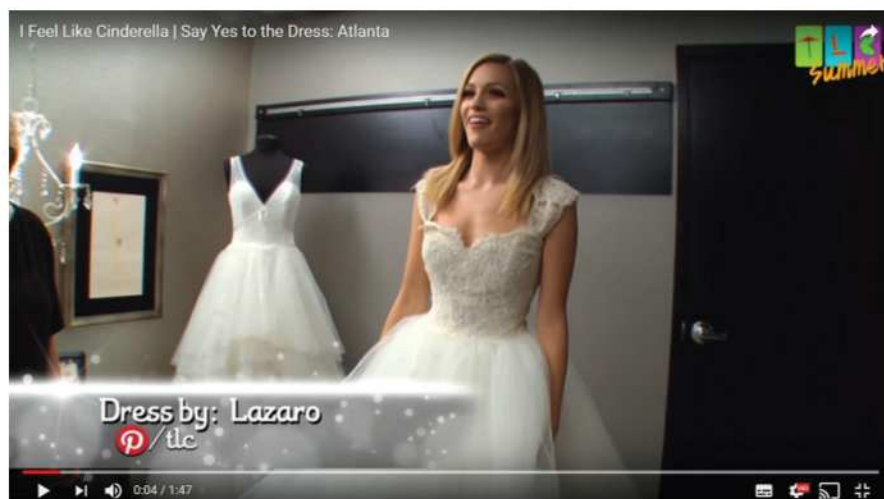


Fig. 11: "I feel like Cinderella" are the words (positively connoted – the reference is to Cinderella as a princess, not as a servant) of the bride on seeing herself in this wedding gown. From SAY YES TO THE DRESS, Atlanta, TLC, uploaded 3 August 2018.<sup>17</sup>

one, is a ritual in which two human beings, in this instance Prince Harry and Markle, are socially and symbolically joined together as individual persons. Weddings have a strong sense of the individual: commercials, films, TV series, and internet discussions tell us that a wedding is about two individuals, their hopes, their emotions, their wishes. A wedding should be the best day of their lives, with the perfection of the day often measured in terms of its material staging. For example, that the bridal-gown must be "perfect" for the individual who will wear it is the message of the US reality TV show SAY YES TO THE DRESS (fig. 11):<sup>18</sup> this TV format shows willing brides going to buy *their* wedding dresses, telling us their expectations of being a "princess" (here we encounter a connection to a royal wedding as the perfect ritual and to a royal life as a perfect way of being) for one day, and showing us their emotions when they find the "one and only" dress for them. Thereby we are presented with an implicit link between the "one and only" love and the "one and only" dress.

The wedding is personalized mostly through material media, so in the clothes, flowers, menu, cake, and location, for example. But the ritual action and the sequence of the ritual are often regulated according to the contemporary US-Euro-

17 SAY YES TO THE DRESS, youtube.com: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x\\_dkXqq\\_cSI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_dkXqq_cSI) [accessed 9 August 2018]

18 This series has been streamed since 2007 on the television network TLC. Each episode is 22 minutes long and normally shows three brides, two looking for their perfect dresses and one at the fitting stage. The series SAY YES TO THE DRESS CANADA and SAY YES TO THE DRESS UK have followed.

pean context. They follow the idea of the “traditional wedding”, but this so-called tradition has mainly been formed by and communicated through media, especially since the 1950s. Its hallmarks include the assumption that the bride’s father will escort his daughter to the location where the wedding ceremony will take place, he will “give” her to the groom, a spoken element of the ritual will follow, often including vows, rings will be exchanged, music will be played. Eating and drinking are part of the ritual, usually after the ceremony just described, sometimes with music and dance incorporated. In the 1950s this form of wedding was globalized by media such as novels and television. Before the 1950s wedding rituals differed according to the wealth of the bridal pair, religious background, region, context (urban or rural), and circumstance (whether the bride was a virgin or a widow, for example).<sup>19</sup>

Weddings form an idea of the individual but only in light of collective expectations of how a wedding could and should be. Marriage ceremonies are collective events because more than two people are part of them, but they are also collective because they are associated with (and often based on) collective normative ideas of issues such as gender, hierarchy, sexuality, family, and rites of passage. Such collective norms are reproduced by individuals not only in rituals but also in language.

In addition to their functions in joining two persons in a socio-religious or economic contract, the wedding, the bride, and the groom can also become metaphors for collective ideas and norms. The connotations of the wedding metaphor are normally positive, mirroring values such as love, close connection, joy, happiness, even life’s purpose. Again, the media are crucial for the construction and transmission of these norms: the metaphors associated with marriage and weddings are media metaphors. They have been in place since antiquity, as we see in the examples of the story of Cupid and Psyche in Apuleius Madaurensis’s *Metamorphoses / The Golden Ass* or in Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (“On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury”).

The private and the public, tradition and innovation, the collective and the individual are six categories that can be applied in analysing marriage rituals. They form a hexagon of perspectives, but they also merge into each other. The public is a collective space and tradition is based on collective norms, and weddings also sit between these categories: they are semi-private, semi-traditional, and semi-individual. Wedding rituals thus form a point of intersection at which basic elements of living together coincide. They can be analysed from different angles and perspectives and with a focus on different media. (Audio-) visual media, clothes, music, and texts, for example, all play significant roles in this complex communication process, as the contributions to this issue show.

<sup>19</sup> See Caloy 1989 (for the role of the bride); Wiswe 1990 (for the change in bridal gowns); Cohen Grossman 2001 (for diversity in Jewish weddings).





Fig. 12: The religious setting of the royal wedding (PBS, News Hour, 21 May 2018, 00:47:18).<sup>20</sup>

## MARRIAGE AND RELIGION

As a last point in this introduction we want to reflect on the interrelation of marriage and religion, for this multi-layered link is the basis of our approach. A wedding is a social and legal contract between two individuals (and sometimes their families) that in various ways is linked to religion, sometimes more, as in the case of Harry and Meghan (fig. 12), and sometimes less. We note here different levels of interaction: ritual and semantic, emotional, and moral. Empirical observation of these etic-scientific categories shows that they are intertwined.

First, as noted above, weddings can be defined as rites of passage for they mark the individuals' leaving the group composed of singles and joining a new social group. This progression can be indicated by rituals symbolizing barriers that have to be passed or overcome together. For example, at a wedding in Switzerland in 2015 the couple encountered just such a symbolic barrier in the form of a bedsheet held by the two witnesses to the marriage and painted with a heart and their names. The bridal couple had to clip the heart with scissors and then climb through the hole in the sheet together.<sup>21</sup> This is a typical ritual symbolizing entry into a new social status.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j51O4lf232w> [accessed 29 June 2018].

<sup>21</sup> We asked the bride if we might include a picture of this ritual in this article (via Facebook on 8 August 2018), but she refused, explaining that she and her husband had not liked having such games at their wedding and that they did not want the public to see them. Her comment supports a thesis by Hilde Schäffler that proposes that traditional wedding customs and games marking the liminal status of the couple are not welcomed by contemporary couples. Such traditional elements are risky in the sense that they are unexpected (and not planned by the couple) and are perceived as disturbing the "perfect" structure of the wedding. See Schäffler 2012, 190–206.

The concept of the rite of passage was elaborated by Arnold van Gennep and published in 1909.<sup>22</sup> He posited, based on ethnographical material gathered from Switzerland to Madagascar, a comparative structure for rituals of social transition and rituals of separation, a phase of liminality, and integration into the new group. This theory was popularized through the work of Victor Turner in the 1960s and since then has often been used, but also criticized.<sup>23</sup> Ritual studies expert Ronald Grimes argues, for example, that the ritual structure elaborated by van Gennep is too static. Grimes proposes the concept of “ritualizing”, defined as “the process whereby ritual creativity is exercised”.<sup>24</sup> He places more emphasis than van Gennep on the fluidity of ritual. A wedding is, as we have seen, such a fluid rite of passage. It is both private and public, individual and collective, a commonplace event and something extraordinary and – as we argue – religious and secular. Even totally secular weddings are often linked through their ritual structure to religion. They are mostly more than simply the signing of a contract; they include something of a beginning, climax, and end, with music, addresses, vows, religious symbols such as rings that are exchanged, and expressions of “eternal” love. They often remained based on a ritual structure, and that structure is usually such that it connects them with current religious rituals. Linked to this ritual structure is the use of religious semantics in wedding rituals: religious rituals remain the common matrix for weddings, even secular ones: religious experts are asked to perform the ritual; religious symbols such as candles, crosses, and rings are included. Sometimes even a civil marriage ceremony is performed according to the outline of a Christian wedding, with something resembling a sermon given by the registrar and rings exchanged. Alternative religious worldviews can also play an important role on this semantic level, as we see in the example of the neopagan weddings with handfasting rituals that take place in Britain and the United States.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, and in relation to the ritual and the semantic, weddings involve (or stage) extraordinary emotions. Media such as television, films, and the internet provide models for such emotional expression: the wedding day is staged as the “best day” in the life of bride and groom; (romantic) love is performed and sold as the most important thing in life. As a result something transcendental is involved. The love performed at a wedding is not common or ordinary. The ritual communicates love not as a hormonal condition but as something supernatural, with religious metaphors such as “immortal or eternal love”, “love of the soul”, “greatest happiness of life” used to express the special character of the moment and of the ritual.

22 Van Gennep 1975.

23 See Turner 1969; Houseman/Severi 1998, 170.

24 Grimes 1995, 60.

25 See, from an emic perspective, Kaldera/Schwartzstein 2003.



Thirdly, religion remains the driving factor for the moral character of weddings: the whiteness of the dress symbolizing purity (and virginity), the rings symbolizing eternity, the vows before a powerful entity (a god or a state), the meaningful flowers, for example, are all visual and semantic aspects of this moral concern. Additionally, the worldview associated with marriage continues to be religiously affected: the ideal is to remain (sexually and morally) true to one's partner. Infidelity, like lack of affection, is a reason for the couple to decouple. The success of the married couple is measured against the normative concept of the Holy Family, often as communicated by the media: the wedding is an emotional ritual on the path to becoming a similarly holy family.<sup>26</sup>

A final summary of these thoughts: we argue that weddings are related to religion on various levels, with some connections more apparent than others. Media play an important role in forming and communicating these connections: in the cultural West, "we" have an understanding of the wedding event and the nature of the holy family that comes from novels, images, and films. We want to see the bride in white because brides on television and in films wear white. We know that we have to be true to our partner because media, from advertisements to novels, tell us that such is our responsibility. We adopt the staging of the marriage ritual and have an idea of how a "real" or "good" wedding ritual (both are normative categories) might look from broadcast events such as the wedding of Prince Harry and Markle, but also from fictitious weddings portrayed in movies and on the internet.

## THE ARTICLES IN THE CURRENT ISSUE

The current issue starts with two articles on audio-visual media. The first contribution focusses on classical Hollywood cinema and the second discusses the American television series *GREY'S ANATOMY* (US, ABC, 2005–). Adopting a philosophical approach, Toufic El-Khoury shows how the "comedy of remarriage", a term Stanley Cavell assigned in his study of classical Hollywood comedies, belongs to a specific school of thought. In his article "Marriage and its Representations in Classical Hollywood Comedy (1934–1945). Stanley Cavell, the Concept of Skepticism and Kierkegaard's Legacy", he discusses the black-and-white Hollywood feature film *THE AWFUL TRUTH* (Leo McCarey, US 1937) as a case study that elucidates inconsistencies in the concepts of marriage and love. In their article "Anatomy of a Wedding: Examining Religiosity, Feminism, and Weddings in *GREY'S ANATOMY*", Sharon Lauricella and Hannah M. Scott examine the diversity of wedding practices in that series. They identify a tension in the program's portrayal of traditional heterosexual weddings and its progressive inclusion of

<sup>26</sup> For the concept of the Holy Family and the role of the media see Fritz 2018.

a lesbian ceremony. These depictions reflect the challenges of navigating expectations and personal objectives associated with performing as a woman in contemporary culture. Next, a historical approach to wedding practices analyses the *charivari*, a noisy and, for the couple who are to marry, offensive procession in the period from the mid-18th to mid-19th century in the region of Bern in Switzerland. In “Charivari or the Historicising of a Question. The Irrelevance of Romantic Love for the Audio-Visual Performance of Marriage in Bern in the 18th and 19th Centuries”, Arno Haldemann interprets this parade as in effect an audio-visual and violent expression against nonconformist marriages in line with collective attitudes and local custom.

Weddings are performed as ritual, but they can also be used as strong religious metaphors. In his article “Bridal Mysticism, Virtual Marriage and Masculinity in the Moravian Hymnbook *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch*”, Benedikt Bauer explores marriage as a metaphor for mystical piety in the Moravian Church. With a gender-focused analysis of the Moravian hymnbook, he discusses lyrical-level constructions of masculinity in relation to bridal mysticism, heteronormative structures, and a specific religious worldview.

In the open section Vuk Uskokovic’s essay shows how ways of representation that break with convention allow for new ways of thinking, using as his model the films of New Wave director Jean-Luc Godard. In a second step his deliberations in *Revisiting the Relevance of Conceptualism of Godard’s Film* are transferred to academic language and publication conventions in general. The author postulates that Godard’s intuitive practices and his deconstruction of reigning standards could be applied to science as well. Godard’s artistic work challenged the canon; according to Uskokovic such a strategy could be enriching in science too.

The contribution to the open section has parallels with the discussion of wedding practices. Conventions are prevalent in the ritual of the wedding, often deeply rooted in religious tradition as it affects gender, clothing, music, or the ritual itself. These conventions can be repeated, contested, transgressed, and transformed, which opens up a broad, challenging, and multi-faceted field of study.

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Toufic El-Khoury

## Marriage and Its Representations in Classical Hollywood Comedy, 1934–1945

### Stanley Cavell, the Concept of Skepticism, and Kierkegaard's Legacy

#### ABSTRACT

This article explores the questions of marriage and divorce as discussed by Stanley Cavell in his study of classical Hollywood comedies, in which he considered a popular subgenre of the American comedy of the thirties and forties that he dubbed the “comedy of remarriage”. It focuses on Cavell’s analysis of a series of films and the way these comedies belong to a specific American school of thought with a case study of *THE AWFUL TRUTH* (Leo McCarey, US 1937). It then seeks to identify traces of Kierkegaard’s moral legacy, by way of Wittgenstein’s influence on the American thinker, in Cavell’s original approach to marriage and divorce in light of his discussion of philosophical skepticism.

#### KEYWORDS

Classical Hollywood comedy, Stanley Cavell, cinema, skepticism, cinematic representations of marriage, Søren Kierkegaard

#### BIOGRAPHY

Toufic El-Khoury is Assistant Professor (Maître de conférences) at the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth (USJ, Beirut, Lebanon) and Lecturer at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA, University of Balamand, Lebanon). He is the author of *La Comédie hollywoodienne classique (1929–1945), structure triadique et médiations du désir* («Champs visuels», 2016) and the co-editor, with Alain Brenas, of *La ville méditerranéenne au cinéma* (Orizons, 2015). He is the editor of the Film Studies series «Cinématographies» (Orizons, Paris, France).

## MARRIAGE AND ITS REPRESENTATIONS IN COMEDY

Representations of marriage in theater and film, more specifically in comedy, are logically correlated to the mores, habits, and customs of the countries that produce them. We can identify two ways those dramatic representations have

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been the subject of significant transformation and also how the production context has influenced the conventions of comedy.

First, the basic narrative structure of Greek new comedy, or Menandrian comedy (fourth century BCE), the dominant comic model in western theater until the seventeenth century and based in the Greek and Latin traditions, became obsolete when the conception of marriage started to change. The narrative structure of new comedy was summarized by Northrop Frye:

What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will. In this simple pattern there are several complex elements. In the first place, the movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero, and the moment when this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution in the action, the comic discovery, anagnorisis or cognition.<sup>1</sup>

This narrative model remained the comic convention in western theater until the beginning of the seventeenth century (Molière respected it, while parodying it, in most of his popular plays – see, for instance, *L'Ecole des femmes* or the subplot of *L'Avare*). Playwrights in various countries had begun, however, to take liberties with it: Shakespeare in England, Lope de Vega in Spain, and Corneille in France (though less popular for his comedies than Molière, he contributed substantially to the genre<sup>2</sup>) were modifying the comic dynamics of the central conflict. The main change was in the representation of the principal young couple: while in the new comedy model the obstacle the lovers must overcome is externally imposed, in the comedies of the abovementioned authors, the obstacles are a product of the couple's own actions and desires. Conflict takes place within the intricacies of reciprocal affection rather than in the midst of social or generational opposition.

1 Frye 1990, 163. Charles Mauron gives a differently detailed account of this narrative convention in his *Psychocritique du genre comique*: "The young girl, the object of dispute, is the property of the father who guards her or the leno who sells her. The emancipation by marriage is henceforth the story's challenge. The general traits of the new comedy are thus established for many centuries. Its necessary types – rich father (and his avatars), young and penniless lover, cunning servants, young girls and courtesans – will pass under slightly modified forms from antiquity to modern comedy, bringing with them a whole procession of much older grotesque figures: parasite, cook, rural figures, blowhard soldier, etc.", Mauron 1970, 80, my translation.

2 The plays that epitomize those changes are *La Galerie du Palais* (1631) and *La Place Royale* (1633) by Corneille, *The Gardener's Dog* (1618) by Lope de Vega, and *The Taming of the Shrew* (1592), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), and *Much Ado About Nothing* (1599), among others, by Shakespeare.

These changes in the representations of marriage in comedy are explained by a shift in western societies whereby marriage was no longer considered simply a family pact and the views of the couple were taken into consideration. Irène Théry has proposed that the idea of a “marriage of love” appeared in literature and was staged in the theater as a reaction against the abuse of paternal power, family alliances, and the Church. The success of works promoting “renewal of the matrimonial relationship” (as in the subsequent novels and essays of Rousseau) especially with female readers is evidence of the centrality of the female identity to demands for a new model of marriage.<sup>3</sup> Freedom became part of understandings of marriage, specifically the freedom of the individuals who might marry to accept or reject the married condition.

The new comic convention, with the obstacles to the happiness of the couple generated by the couple themselves, became more popular as the societies in question underwent transformations that included the emergence of a middle class which formed a significant part of the theatrical audience.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the definition of marriage as a social pact was gradually replaced by the possibility of reconciling social necessity and individual aspiration. Within the context of the contestation of the traditional matrimonial model, “free choice of spouse” became one of the major themes of comedy. In Shakespeare, Corneille, and Lope de Vega we see the comic tension shifting from a conflict between law and desire to a more detailed investigation of the contradictions of desire itself.<sup>5</sup> Thus, these authors opened the way for modern comedy, anticipating the works of Marivaux or Goldoni.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Marivaux’s female characters, although in part inspired by comic types inherited from the *Commedia dell’arte*, acquired a strong individual conscience, and the “internalization of conflict, essential for the development of comedy”,<sup>7</sup> became one of the most remarkable specificities of his theater.<sup>8</sup>

3 See Théry 2001, 81.

4 See Girard 1990, 54–55.

5 In most cases, the traditional authority figures become *conscience figures* in modern comedy: they comment the heroes’ actions instead of opposing them and have only a peripheral impact, and sometimes no impact, on the course of events (Girard 1990, 53), as observed in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or Marivaux’ *Le jeu de l’amour et du hasard*. In American comedy, this is obvious in the use of character actors specialized in sharp wit and ironic commentary, such as Aunt Patsy (Cecil Cunningham) in *THE AWFUL TRUTH*, a movie we will discuss later. See Karnick 1994, 133.

6 In the case of Pierre Corneille, we can cite his first comedies, *La Galerie du palais* (1631–1632), *La Place Royale* (1633–1634), and *La Suivante* (1634). Marie-Claude Canova discusses the distance between new comedy and the French theatrical tradition by way of Corneille, who substituted “for the traditional Italian intrigue of blocked love affairs, the dramatic canvas of the love chain inherited of the pastorale, with its conflicted couples and the opposition of faithful or philandering and indifferent lovers”, Canova 1993, 70–71: my translation.

7 Martin 1996, 11.

8 See *La Double Inconstance* (1723), *Le Dénouement imprévu* (1724), *Le jeu de l’amour et du hasard* (1730), *Les Serments indiscrets* (1733), and *L’Heureux stratagème* (1734).



An interdisciplinary examination of the relationship between societal legitimacy and organization of marital status, on one hand, and comic traditions, on the other, in a specific community, society, or country would surely be fruitful. The way a society conceives marriage conditions the way it laughs about it. When we look at classical cinema in the United States, Italy, and Egypt, we observe that certain comic traditions related to adultery, divorce or plotting the death of a spouse are more similar for American and Egyptian cinema than for the two western societies. For example, one convention absent from American and Egyptian comedies, though very popular in Italian comedies, is the killing of a spouse, especially the woman. Whereas Catholic Italian society forbids or highly stigmatizes divorce, such is less the case in Protestant and Muslim societies. “Divorce Italian style” (an ironic metaphor for a husband plotting to kill his wife popularized by the title of a Pietro Germi comedy with Marcello Mastroianni<sup>9</sup>) could therefore flourish in Italy but be completely inconsistent with other audiences’ comic habits.<sup>10</sup> Comedy conventions will vary depending on society’s laws and moral norms.

While this particular question deserves its own expanded study, which would involve a comparative examination of comedy in relation to judicial, sociocultural, or theological topics, here we concentrate on a core study of the representation of marriage in American classical comedy. We will focus on Stanley Cavell’s analysis of a specific comic corpus and on the way these comedies discussing marriage belong to a specifically American school of thought. We will then seek to identify traces of Kierkegaard’s philosophical legacy, by way of Wittgenstein’s influence on Cavell, in this American thinker’s definition of marriage.

### STANLEY CAVELL, SKEPTICISM, AND REMARRIAGE: THE AWFUL TRUTH (1937)

Of the seven movies discussed in Cavell’s famous essay on American comedy, *Pursuits of Happiness: Hollywood and the Comedy of Remarriage*, only two treat marriage directly, showing the internal functioning of a married couple with a minimum of external interferences: *THE AWFUL TRUTH* (Leo McCarey, US 1937) and *ADAM’S RIB* (George Cukor, US 1948). And of those two movies only *THE AWFUL TRUTH* has its narrative focused solely on the marriage question – *ADAM’S RIB* centers on two lawyers, happily married, who find themselves on opposing sides in a trial of a philandering husband and a jealous and murderous wife, with

9 Some of the comedies centered on this particular comic plot: *IL VEDOVO* (Dino Risi, IT 1959), *DIVORCE ITALIAN STYLE* (*DIVORZIO ALL’ITALIANA*, Pietro Germi, IT 1961).

10 In France, historically a Roman Catholic country but marked by definitive secular traditions since the beginning of the twentieth century, the “divorce by murder” comic convention appears occasionally in cinema, as with *LA POISON* (Sasha Guitry, FR 1951), about an elderly rural couple trying to murder each other.

their marriage affected by the twists of the legal procedure. *THE AWFUL TRUTH* is therefore of special interest in the present case: it is a thorough examination of what marriage is and launches discussion of what marriage is thought to be or can become.

The story is simple: Jerry (Cary Grant) and Lucy (Irene Dunne) Warriner, a rich and happy couple, decide to divorce immediately after each suspects the other of adultery – even if that adultery is never confirmed or refuted, with neither of the protagonists making much effort to prove the spouse wrong. After a short battle to gain custody of the dog, Mr. Smith (a comic substitute for children), Lucy Warriner is courted by the handsome but naïve Southern oil tycoon Dan Leeson, played by Ralph Bellamy – Bellamy plays another “whipping boy” character for Grant in *HIS GIRL FRIDAY* (Howard Hawks, US 1940), another “comedy of remarriage” discussed by Cavell. After Jerry has done everything to undermine that relationship and Lucy is ready to come back to him, a series of misunderstandings again alienates the couple. Jerry then courts a rich heiress, but Lucy succeeds in sabotaging the engagement – leading to her reuniting, in a “screwball” way, with Jerry. The final scene, in a movie filled with quips, misunderstandings, and farcical situations, is subtly and surprisingly cerebral.

In this final scene, Jerry and Lucy Warriner find themselves in their old country house, in separate rooms, trying but unable to sleep. A door with a defective lock separates them but continually opens by itself, leading first to a dry verbal confrontation and then to a more intense and intimate conversation. Each of the protagonists has obvious difficulty in dealing with his or her “opponent’s” intimacy and space. This problem of intimacy is persistent: sleeping in contingent rooms, they have a problem with going through the common doorway that no one would have used if the door had not had a defective lock. In addition, the initial confusions are never clarified, unlike, usually, those in comic theater: the two weeks that Jerry Warriner spent in Florida remain a mystery, as does the “night” Lucy and her piano teacher, Duvalle, spent in a hotel room as a result the breakdown of the car. McCarey is less interested in the resolutions of farcical misunderstandings than in confronting the characters with their demons and, one might say, the hellish nature of conversation or the lack of conversation: the movie’s twists are not parenthetical to the couple’s harmony but rather a critical reevaluation of what legitimizes such a harmony. Moreover, the final sequence, punctuated by the failures of the defective lock that open the door and force them into conversation, introduces a dialogue built on strange and amusing syllogisms, or rather anti-syllogisms, where the logical terms defining a love relation seem to be leading to illogical compromises.

Cavell constructs his analysis of remarriage comedy around the issue of skepticism. According to Hall’s summary,



Philosophical skepticism is a reservation or doubt about the legitimacy of a whole segment of knowledge claims. ... Philosophical skepticism involves a doubt about the legitimacy of any knowledge claim whatsoever. ... [This doubt] concerns the legitimacy of this segment of claims, or the legitimacy of every claim, to knowledge.”

Hence, in Cavell’s mind the protagonists of remarriage comedy are confronted not only with the quips and pros of marriage, but also with their own understanding of the nature of the conjugal bond in which they are involved. In other words, the couple is tested: how can two beings communicate and exist in each other’s space while different and at the same time equal?<sup>12</sup> On that issue we can turn to the final conversation between the soon-to-be-reunited ex-married couple, discussed by Cavell, which goes as follows:

JERRY: In a half an hour, we’ll no longer be Mr. and Mrs. Funny, isn’t it?

LUCY: Yes, it’s funny that everything’s the way it is on account of the way you feel.

JERRY: Huh?

LUCY: Well, I mean, if you didn’t feel that way you do, things wouldn’t be the way they are, would they? I mean, things could be the same if things were different.

JERRY: But things are the way you made them.

LUCY: Oh, no. No, things are the way you think I made them. I didn’t make them that way at all. Things are just the same as they always were, only you’re the same as you were too, so I guess things will never be the same again. [...] You’re all confused, aren’t you?

JERRY: Aren’t you?

LUCY: No.

JERRY: Well you should be, because you’re wrong about things being different because they’re not the same. Things are different except in a different way. You’re still the same, only I’ve been a fool... but I’m not now.

LUCY: Oh.

JERRY: So long as I’m different don’t you think that... well maybe things could be the same again... only a little different, huh?<sup>13</sup>

In discussing the terms “different” and “same”, the protagonists realize that the equation of these terms gives improbable results. The second scene of the movie (the couple’s first fight) and the last one (the couple in the middle of their reconciliation) are inverses: the second scene uses a frontal, almost static camera, with a predominance of “American shots” and an almost absence of close-ups; the last one uses a diagonal representation of the couple, multiple shots with significant depth of field, and medium shots that underline the dialectical

<sup>11</sup> Hall 1994, 149–150.

<sup>12</sup> See García 2012, 177.

<sup>13</sup> This scene starts at the 82nd minute and ends at the 85th (last but one) minute of the movie.

complexity of this reunion, suggesting the reconciliation without allowing, yet, a physical intimacy. The conclusion to be drawn from this conversation may be that love between protagonists cannot be reduced to a mathematical logic. It can be likened to a Kierkegaardian “leap” into faith: a movement out of the rational or a paradoxical acceptance of the weakness of one’s desires.

In McCarey’s movie, as in other famous comedies of the classical Hollywood era, conflict that is initially a public, temporal, and social matter starts to affect the private sphere – as in the example of ADAM’S RIB. The dichotomy between the private and public spheres in which the couple evolves completes an inherent discussion of equivalence and difference in love and in the ethics of marriage.

In its paradox-filled examination of conjugal behavior, *THE AWFUL TRUTH* offers a synthesis, but also a critical reevaluation, of comic representations of marriage that preceded it. In Shakespearean comedy, marriage comes as a culmination that ends the complicated games of love and the misunderstandings revealing the shortcomings of human desire. Theatrical farce (*Vaudeville* in French) parodies the marital constitution and alters the boundaries that marriage creates between the couple and society – the moral contract is supposed partially to cut off the married couple from the outside world, with the couple essentially asocial: hence, their exposure to all temptations. As a result, the intrusion of the potential lover into the conjugal home, as we see in *THE AWFUL TRUTH*, leads to an obliteration of the spatial and moral distinction between established order (marriage, bourgeoisie) and the secret or marginal (adultery, life of pleasures), and therefore social rules lose all meaning. The result is a confusion of states (secret and revelation), spaces (private and public), and status (husband and lover).

However, more importantly, the movie shows two protagonists exercising their freedom fully and aware of all the contradictions and complications this exercise implies. Their decisions to break up and reconcile, to leave unclarified their suspicions about possible philandering, and to realize that their separation is an integral part of their conjugal process are at the core of the comic plot. The starting point of Cavell’s examination of marriage is that “a legitimate marriage requires that the pair is free to marry, that there is no impediment between them”, typical of the way, as we have noted, marriage gradually came to be conceived from the seventeenth century. However, he continues by saying that “this freedom is announced in [the comedies of remarriage] in the concept of divorce”,<sup>14</sup> introducing a paradox to today’s understanding of what marriage is.

In McCarey’s movie, marriage is a mental state that the couple cannot fully experience without a certain sense of withdrawal and the constant trials of a

14 Cavell 1981, 102–103.



vain and indefinite desire. The individuals who make up the couple must try to pull themselves out of this state to understand better their acceptance of it. The movie shows us the conflict and a way to resolve it but without guaranteeing success, thus faithful to the comic spirit. More importantly, it is the lack of a guarantee that the marriage will succeed, its inherent fallibility, that gives the it legitimacy in the minds of the parties involved.

## CAVELL AND KIERKEGAARD'S LEGACY

Cavell's approach seems rooted in what he considers a typically American way of discussing marriage and romance. That idea is popular, but it is not always accepted. David Shumway, a cultural and literary historian, criticizes Cavell's approach and locates the American screwball comedies' approach to love and marriage in a more global cultural legacy. He also claims that as the social role of marriage grew smaller, the conjugal state was associated with romance and intimacy. Whereas medieval romances opposed love and the state of marriage, as noted by Denis de Rougemont in his study of Béroul's *Tristan and Iseult*,<sup>15</sup> the seventeenth century introduced the idea of love as an emotion which formed a source of marriage and as no longer "directed by social institutions such as family or religion".<sup>16</sup> The new form of marriage we encountered earlier started to appear in the seventeenth century in a form designated "companionate marriage" in England, but not as a product of romance. According to Shumway, "The choice of spouse was increasingly left in the hands of children themselves and was based mainly on temperamental compatibility with the aim of lasting companionship".<sup>17</sup> Two discourses start to coexist, in essence contradictory and their differences unrecognized. Romance offered "adventure, intense emotion and the possibility of finding the perfect mate", while intimacy promised "deep communication, friendship and sharing that will last beyond the passion of new love".<sup>18</sup>

In his study, Shumway points out a first paradox in our modern understanding of what marriage must be. However, the idea of paradox is at the heart of Cavell's discussion of the subject. Moreover, Shumway's assumption, as well as his remarks about the difficulty of establishing the grounds for reciprocity while discussing the unpredictability of human desire, suggests a tension between two discourses that we can find in Kierkegaard's thought about the same institution.

One of the differences between Kierkegaard's esthetical and the ethical stages concerns the subject's choice to free himself from all "profane" mediations – the judgment of an outside gaze. For instance, in "Some Reflections on

<sup>15</sup> See de Rougemont 2001, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Shumway 2003, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Shumway 2003, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Shumway 2003, 27.



Marriage in Answer to Objections – By a Married Man”, the second section of *Stages on Life's Way*, the narrator-spouse notices that his appreciation of his wife's singing and piano-playing is based not on comparative criteria, but on the subject-wife's specific particularities (because it is she, Montaigne would say):

Although being a husband for eight years, I do not know yet with certainty how my wife presents herself in the eyes of other's critical view. ... It is exactly because my love means everything to me that, to my mind, criticism only leads to nonsense.<sup>19</sup>

Starting from a desire without a precise object or a desire for women in general, in the aesthetical stage, rational love for one woman determines the achievement of the ethical stage, in the Kierkegaardian meaning of the concept – represented by the married man, who, in short, takes responsibility for his life and becomes aware of his responsibilities toward others, clearly defining his objects of desire and fully experiencing the challenges of reciprocity.<sup>20</sup>

Influenced by the Danish author and by Gertrude Stein, Cavell reprises Kierkegaard's moral thought, to which he probably had access via his reading of Wittgenstein, as evidenced in an article reprised in his essay *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*. If the relation between Cavell and Wittgenstein centers on the language and the “immediacy of knowledge”, the similarities between Cavell and Kierkegaard on ethics, specifically on matrimonial ethics, are more difficult to define. However, Cavell's admiration for Kierkegaard stresses the similarities between their approaches to marriage. In an article exploring this continuity between the two authors, Ronald L. Hall proposes,

Cavell has adopted, knowingly or not, a Kierkegaardian way of thinking, especially in what he says about skepticism and about marriage. ... His thought is informed at critical junctures by a peculiarly Kierkegaardian dialectic. This peculiar dialectic I will call “the dialectic of paradox”.<sup>21</sup>

Kierkegaard already had a very specific conception of paradox. In his *Philosophical Fragments*, he stated,

<sup>19</sup> Kierkegaard 1988, 106–107. My translation.

<sup>20</sup> A scene of *THE AWFUL TRUTH* reflects, unintentionally and as parody, the affirmation of the husband in Kierkegaard's text who notes that his wife's voice is “good enough” for him, meaning external criteria and comparison do not condition his judgment of his wife's voice. In the movie, the wife, Lucy Warriener, a trained singer, sings a song with her suitor, Dan Leeson (Ralph Bellamy), who does not realize that Lucy is a talented singer. This detail reappears later for dramatic purposes (his mother reveals to them that Lucy had a music teacher and that he is the direct cause of Lucy's divorce). Nevertheless, the singing scene underlines the fact that Dan Leeson, unable to evaluate Lucy's voice, is not necessarily the appropriate mate for her. He is just able to say that he himself had lessons and is mildly interested in her answers. What starts as an intimate, reciprocal activity – each of them singing, even without talent, just for the other to appreciate – ends in what seems to be, in the case of Dan Leeson, a need for external judgment and appreciation. See Macarthur 2014, 99.

<sup>21</sup> Hall 1994, 145.

One should not think slightingly of the paradoxical; for the paradox is the source of the thinker's passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity. But the highest pitch of every passion is always to will its own downfall; and so it is also the supreme passion of the Reason to seek a collision, though this collision must in one way or another prove its undoing. The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think.<sup>22</sup>

Hall develops this idea by identifying a dialectic of paradox in Kierkegaard's thought, a dialectic he summarizes as follows:

For the first time, a new unity between opposites is possible; but in this new unity, the oppositions are accentuated, not resolved. ... This dialectic of paradox in which something may be said to be necessarily present in some phenomenon, but present as absent, occurs over and over in Kierkegaard's thinking.<sup>23</sup>

Hall gives the example of the dialectical relations in Kierkegaard's writings between resignation (or despair) and faith.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Kierkegaard questioned another paradoxical pattern in the matrimonial process. In his *Stages in Life's Way*, he stresses a fundamental difficulty in marriage: love or nascent love (or, one might say, desire) is immediate but marriage is a decision. He does not consider love alone, for it implies a blind and thoughtless adoration Kierkegaard fears and warns against.<sup>25</sup> Emotion is reaffirmed and reevaluated by a rational process, suggesting the construction of reciprocity by experience and an affirmation of reason – even if the process seems to hardly accommodate the immediacy of love. The experience of reciprocity allows the individuals involved to be fully aware of the contradictions of the process on which they have embarked, but it also allows them to be conscious that those contradictions are part of the potential success of the experience and the achievement of conversation between lovers – in that sense, the question of faith comes into the equation. For this reason,

Love must be welcomed into marriage or into the resolution; willing to marry means that the most immediate of all things must be, at the same time, the freest of resolutions. ... Marriage is a resolution that does not ensue directly from the immediacy of love.<sup>26</sup>

22 Kierkegaard 1962, 46.

23 Hall 1994, 146–147.

24 "For Kierkegaard's, faith excludes and at the same time includes both resignation and despair; faith would not be faith apart from both elements, yet faith constantly annuls both", Hall 1994, 147.

25 He asserts that "there is a form of modesty against which the most intense adorations is an offense, a form of infidelity against the loved one; even if this adoration, in the mind of the lover, connects him indissolubly to her, it is a form of infidelity because in this admiration there is a criticism in play", Kierkegaard 1988, 132, my translation.

26 Kierkegaard 1978, 95–96, my translation.



We can identify a similar tension in American remarriage comedy, a tension that is perhaps not sufficiently underlined by Cavell even if it is in accord with his approach to the subject: the non-conformity between the nature (multiform, fluctuant) of desire and the immutable form of marriage. In a way, it is the meeting of an irresistible force with an immovable object – to employ Johnny Mercer’s lyrics in “Something’s Gotta Give”. In defining the conjugal state, Cavell implies that desire for a single person must exist in a constantly renewed institution and that the momentarily dissolved relationship between lovers implicates the possibility of divorce and constitutes at the same time the moral legitimacy of the conjugal bond. It is on this level that the inherent paradox of both philosophers’ discussions of marriage is most obvious. Cavell asserts this idea by explicitly drawing comparisons with Kierkegaard in his study of *THE AWFUL TRUTH*, defining what he calls

the two most impressive affirmations known to me of the task of human experience, the acceptance of human relatedness, as the acceptance of repetition. Kierkegaard’s study called *repetition*, which is a study of the possibility of marriage... As redemption by suffering does not depend on something that has already happened, so redemption by happiness does not depend on something that has yet to happen; both depend on a faith in something that is always happening, day by day.<sup>27</sup>

The paradox on which Cavell and Kierkegaard rely allows them to revise the idea of what marriage is (what its values are, what the norms traditionally associated with it are, how it is conceived in certain socio-cultural and religious contexts), and what marriage should be, or is meant to be, when it is reevaluated inside the intricacies of an intimate bond and the specific experiences of a couple. This focus on reciprocity shifts attention from the institution regarded as part of the public sphere and conventions, and even as part of a metaphysical discourse, to a discussion on marriage that suggests a new kind of discourse where the authority of marriage is determined by its inherent flaws and ambivalence. Cavell summarizes this as follow:

If what is to succeed Christianity [as Kierkegaard comprehends it, in Cavell’s mind] is a redemptive politics or a redemptive psychology, these will require a new burden of faith in the authority of one’s everyday experience, one’s experience of the everyday... One might take the new burden of one’s experience to amount to the claim to be one’s own apostle, to forerun oneself, to be capable of deliverances of oneself.<sup>28</sup>

With this idea, Cavell draws definite parallels between Kierkegaard, on one hand, and Emerson and Thoreau, on the other, the American thinkers on whom he relies heavily in his study (and in his work in general), suggesting that the

<sup>27</sup> Cavell 1981, 241.

<sup>28</sup> Cavell 1981, 240.



burden of faith in daily experiences and in one's intimate perception of complex questioning is at the heart of American transcendentalist thought.

Cavell sees marriage as "the repetition of everydayness".<sup>29</sup> The essence of his view of marriage has the same paradoxical pattern as the ideas of Kierkegaard: Cavell describes marriage with concepts not usually related to it. The notion of the "leap" developed by Kierkegaard is particularly revealing, and also surprising in its evocation of a need for constant renewal inside a state determined by permanence. The threat of divorce consolidates the legitimacy of marriage in Cavell's argumentation, just as the fallibility of marriage, in Kierkegaard's ethical stage, gives it its credibility, and just as the risk of metaphysical doubt consolidates, in the religious stage, the possibility of faith.<sup>30</sup> Marriage for Cavell, like faith for Kierkegaard, is a gamble, for it rests not on a religious certitude or on a sacred and unbreakable bond (the indefectible contract for the first, the rational proof of the existence of God for the second), but on the risks inherent in an individual choice that we accept, and assume, despite everything.<sup>31</sup> Thus, remarriage is the essence of modern marriage: an improbable game and education, defined by action instead of intention, conversation instead of norms. In his study of another comedy, *IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT* (Frank Capra, US 1934), Cavell describes the adventures of a couple, not a married couple, but still one experiencing all the conflictual interactions, the construction of an intimacy, and the ability to converse normally associated with the development of a conjugal bond. The couple are on the run for various reasons (Ellen Andrews, a rich heiress, is escaping her father to reunite with her playboy husband, and Peter Warne, a worn reporter, is helping her in order to get the exclusive story; they recognize in predictable fashion that they are falling for one another), and we realize very quickly, in Cavell's words, that

what this pair does together is less important than the fact that they do whatever it is together, that they know how to spend time together, even that they would rather waste time together than do anything else – except that no time they are together could be wasted.<sup>32</sup>

The comic adventures underline the reciprocity this couple is building and present a particularity of the love process that we can identify as a "spiritual camaraderie", a notion already popular in the 1920s and found in Wilhelm Reich's

<sup>29</sup> See Cavell 1981, 241.

<sup>30</sup> One of the most famous statements by Kierkegaard interweaves faith and marriage. Talking about his inability to marry his longtime fiancée, he claimed: "If I had faith, I would have married Regine". Did he change his mind about marriage because he was not sure it would succeed? If he had accepted the possibility of failure, marriage would have been possible. Here is the main "awful truth" the movie and Cavell are talking about.

<sup>31</sup> See Cavell 1993, 231–232.

<sup>32</sup> Cavell 1981, 83.

writings in 1930:<sup>33</sup> what matters most in the shared experience of the protagonists is not what they do together but the fact that the experience is shared. The “spiritual camaraderie” refers to action as well as intention. The experience by itself highlights the affective and moral reciprocity: the fact of being married, or together, is less important than the couple’s acknowledgement of an essential feeling, building a consciousness of being a couple. Cavell is less interested in the battle-of-the-sexes comic convention than in the idea of debate: the sexual power relationship, on which comedy built most of its narrative coda, matters less than a moral conversation that articulates how the protagonists will consider living together.

## CONCLUSION

Not every American comedy offers the discussion about marriage provided by the comedies selected by Cavell. In *HEAVEN CAN WAIT* (Ernst Lubitsch, US 1943) for instance, Henry Van Cleeve (Don Ameche), a sympathetic womanizer, arrives in purgatory and confesses that he does not deserve to go to heaven due to his conjugal misdeeds. His marriage to Martha (Gene Tierney) temporarily puts on hold his fun-loving nature and his need to seduce. The movie carefully avoids showing the other women in his life: members of his family talk about them, only their profession (mainly as chorus girls) identifies them, and visual ellipses or external indications suggest their existence, as with the example of the jeweler’s bill found by Martha in Henry’s coat. During his whole life, and until his arrival in purgatory, Henry has been torn between two “feelings”: the esthetical and the ethical, between the Don Juan and the Husband personas, in the Kierkegaardian sense of the words. He is torn between his attraction to all women, to the feminine multitude on one side, and his fidelity to one woman untouched by any critical comparison with the others. Hence, the protagonist is part of a “virtual” triangle, faced with two ideals rather than two persons: one indefinite (a consistent although anonymous feminine multitude) and one a personalized entity (his wife, Martha, representing the whole institution of marriage).

However, for various reasons Cavell’s approach does not seem to apply to Lubitsch’s movie: he states at the beginning of *Pursuits of Happiness* that the movies he selected for his study were written and directed by seminal American authors (Howard Hawks, Leo McCarey, George Cukor, for example). The fact that the movie is adapted from a Hungarian dramatist’s play (*Birthday* by Leslie Bush-Fekete) does not help; it seems to consolidate Cavell’s belief that Lubitsch, like other European directors, has a rather “Continental” view of mar-

<sup>33</sup> See Reich 1993.



riage, strongly influenced by European comic traditions (mainly farce). Even if this assertion is open to discussion, we must admit that as a corpus Cavell's comedies of remarriage do stand to "modern American culture", as Ronald Hall puts it, "as Shakespearean drama to Elizabethan England, as Tragedy stood to the golden age of the Greeks".<sup>34</sup> Those comedies become the reflection of an era's consideration of the conjugal condition in a specific socio-cultural context, an attempt to make "sense of nonsense".<sup>35</sup>

Cavell's thought, though deeply rooted in his reading of Emerson and Thoreau and the American transcendentalist movement in general,<sup>36</sup> constantly reevaluates Kierkegaard's dialectic of paradox to explore a topic – marriage – located at the core of Cavell's discussion of philosophical skepticism.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Kierkegaard's example can reveal the importance of some philosophical currents in Continental thought that irrigate American culture, as European theater and literature determined the first aspects of American cinematic genre developments. Also – and this could lead to a thorough examination in another study, on the relation between religion and generic conventions – Kierkegaard's and Cavell's roots in a predominantly Protestant society may provide an additional input to both philosophers' approaches to the moral foundations of marital conventions.

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<sup>34</sup> Hall 1994, 154.

<sup>35</sup> See Lippitt/Hutto 1998, 263.

<sup>36</sup> American transcendentalism was a philosophical movement that started in the first decades of the 19th century, was rooted in European (and specifically German) romanticism, and was influenced by Indian (dharmic) religions. Against objective empiricism and 19th-century skepticism (David Hume), transcendentalist authors like Ralph Emerson (*Essays*, 1841–1844) and David Thoreau (*Walden, or Life in the Woods*, 1854) believed in the inherent goodness of man and its corruption by the modern world's stances and demands and promoted individualism and a more direct contact to nature.

<sup>37</sup> I would like to thank Nicole Tambourgi-Hatem for her remarks and suggestions that led me to read again Kierkegaard's *Étapes sur le chemin de la vie*.



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Sharon Lauricella and Hannah M. Scott

## Anatomy of a Wedding

### Examining Religiosity, Feminism, and Weddings in GREY'S ANATOMY

#### ABSTRACT

Medical drama GREY'S ANATOMY (Peter Horton, US 2005–) features weddings as pivotal life events and has portrayed 14 unions over the program's 13 seasons on ABC. This article is a synthetic approach combining communication, gender studies, and grounded theory methodology to examine weddings in GREY'S ANATOMY through a feminist lens. We employ Judith Butler's theory of gender performance and Rich's<sup>1</sup> concept of compulsory heterosexuality to examine weddings throughout the show's extensive run. Depictions of women and weddings demonstrate dissonance between hegemonic gender performance and the potential to redefine the performance of woman in one's own ways. Tension exists between the program's portrayal of traditional heterosexual weddings and its progressive inclusion of a lesbian ceremony. We argue that the program's portrayal of both traditional white weddings and ceremonies which are more private and self-defined reflect the challenges inherent in navigating cultural expectations and personal objectives associated with performing as a woman in contemporary culture.

#### KEYWORDS

Wedding, television drama, gender performance, compulsory heterosexuality, feminism, GREY'S ANATOMY

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Sharon Lauricella (Corresponding Author) is Associate Professor and Director in the Communication Program, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, UOIT, Oshawa, ON, Canada ([Sharon.lauricella@uoit.ca](mailto:Sharon.lauricella@uoit.ca)). Hannah Scott is a Masters' candidate in Social Justice and Community Engagement at Wilfrid Laurier University in Brantford, ON, Canada ([scot9810@mylaurier.ca](mailto:scot9810@mylaurier.ca)).

<sup>1</sup> Rich 1980, 631–660.



## ANATOMY OF GREY'S

The phrase “You’re my person” is used as a term of endearment in the highly successful television drama *GREY’S ANATOMY* (Peter Horton, US 2005–). The phrase is remarkable in both its concept and its application because it is not used between characters who have joined together in a marriage or civil union; rather, it is used primarily between friends, such as Meredith Grey and Cristina Yang or Meredith and Alex Karev. Use of this phrase – one usually reserved for those in a romantic relationship – subverts viewers’ expectations and thus demonstrates how *GREY’S ANATOMY* challenges gender norms and normative heterosexuality and the importance of both platonic and romantic relationships in this program. In depicting 14 weddings over the program’s 13 seasons, *GREY’S ANATOMY* takes the opportunity to redefine what it means to perform as a woman, a professional, a wife, a mother, and a friend. This article is a critical content analysis of weddings and religiosity in *GREY’S ANATOMY* and adheres closely to feminist and gender theory.

*GREY’S ANATOMY* has enjoyed longevity and excellent ratings since its inception in 2005. It is currently the longest-running scripted primetime show airing on the ABC television network. The program’s broadcast constancy and positive ratings have earned it multiple Primetime Emmy and Golden Globe Award nominations and it received the Golden Globe 2007 Award for Best Television Series – Drama. The program has been noted for its effects on popular culture, including organ donation<sup>2</sup> and patient satisfaction with their doctors.<sup>3</sup> While in reality few hospitals would have the frequency and turnover of romantic pairings and triangles featured on *GREY’S ANATOMY*, personal relationships in the program drive much of the plotline, depicting the evolution of dating, marriage, and breakups. Over its extensive run, the program features a same-sex marriage, second marriages, and large events and small services, as well as both religious and humanist ceremonies. This article is the first content analysis project to examine *GREY’S ANATOMY* while incorporating feminist theory; the only other feminist examination of the program has addressed casting.<sup>4</sup> It is the first to address marriage and religion in this iconic series.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### FEMINISM, COMMUNICATION, AND RELIGIOSITY

The relationship between feminism and communication is well established, for feminist and gender studies simultaneously emerged and matured alongside

<sup>2</sup> Morgan/Moviuis/Cody 2009, 135–151.

<sup>3</sup> Quick 2009, 38–55.

<sup>4</sup> Long 2011, 1067–1084.

television criticism as legitimate areas of academic study.<sup>5</sup> Feminist approaches were well represented and even the primary areas of focus in many early anthologies of television criticism (for example, Baehr/Dyer,<sup>6</sup> Brown,<sup>7</sup> Curran/Gurevitch,<sup>8</sup> Kaplan<sup>9</sup>). Lotz/Ross call for “methodological plurality”<sup>10</sup> in examining television programming through a feminist lens. This article therefore blends theoretical and methodological approaches by incorporating Butler’s theory of gender performance<sup>11</sup> and Rich’s concept of compulsory heterosexuality<sup>12</sup> together with a grounded theory methodological approach.<sup>13</sup> This “synthetic” approach<sup>14</sup> brings together communication, feminist and gender studies, and television criticism.

#### TELEVISION PERFORMANCE: GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Shonda Rhimes, creator and executive producer of *GREY’S ANATOMY*, sought to portray “smart women” in this drama. Thus feminism and femininity are key to understanding central features of the program, particularly women’s depictions in the show’s weddings. Butler’s theory of gender performativity<sup>15</sup> therefore informs this analysis. A groundbreaking scholar in feminist and queer theory, Butler argues that gender is not something that we *are*, it is something that we *do*. In other words, gender is not dictated by one’s sex as a biological determinant; rather, gender is understood by means of the “performances” that we enact day-to-day. Butler suggests that we perform according to what our culture’s gendered norms, rules, and understandings dictate. However, the performance of gender is a prerequisite for being recognized in our culture, so to be understood as a sexed and gendered individual, one must take on at least some of the norms associated with gender identity.<sup>16</sup> It is through these performances that one is rendered socially recognizable.<sup>17</sup> This analysis of weddings on *GREY’S ANATOMY* considers how women are represented in the context of being brides and whether this representation fits with the sociocultural performance of femininity.

Given the program’s inclusion of lesbian couples and a lesbian wedding, this analysis of *GREY’S ANATOMY* is also grounded in Rich’s pioneering essay “Com-

5 Lotz/Ross 2007, 185–202.

6 Baehr/Dyer 1987.

7 Brown 1990.

8 Curran/Gurevitch 1991.

9 Kaplan 1983.

10 Lotz/Ross 2007, 196.

11 Butler 1990.

12 Rich 1980, 631–660.

13 Charmaz 2006.

14 Lotz/Ross 2007, 185–202.

15 Butler 1990.

16 Butler 2009, i–xiii.

17 Wight 2011, 73–90.

pulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”.<sup>18</sup> Rich argues that the pervasive cultural understandings of sex, gender, and sexual desire have culminated in a social requirement for what Rich calls “compulsory heterosexuality”. Rich suggests that heterosexuality is presumed to be a “‘sexual preference’ of ‘most women’”<sup>19</sup> and this assumption is essential in understanding how and why women – consciously or not – accept, and even embrace, heteronormativity. Rich explains that patriarchal norms have operated so as to convince women that marriage and physical and social attachment to men are inevitable, “even in unsatisfying and oppressive components of their lives”.<sup>20</sup> Heteronormativity, in its cultural dominance, thus keeps the “heterosexual matrix” of sex, gender, and sexual desire intact.<sup>21</sup> Given that *GREY’S ANATOMY* depicts lesbian relationships and a wedding (Season 7, Episode 20), this analysis of the program considers how compulsory heterosexuality is supported, rejected, and navigated in this scripted drama.

The following research questions are addressed in this project:

- (1) How is religion incorporated into weddings in *GREY’S ANATOMY*?
- (2) How do weddings in *GREY’S ANATOMY* support normative female gender performance and compulsory heterosexuality?
- (3) How do weddings in *GREY’S ANATOMY* challenge female gender performance and compulsory heterosexuality?

These research questions help to address the relationship between and amongst religiosity and gender performance, roles, and heteronormativity in weddings portrayed in this scripted drama.

## METHOD

To answer the research questions, a combination of content analysis and grounded theory was employed. The 14 weddings depicted in the program were analyzed via a combination of deductive and inductive data methodologies. Weddings which occurred in the storyline but were not explicitly shown in the drama were not included in this analysis.

Content analysis methods were used to identify the predetermined, deductive category of religiosity. This category was assessed by means of ceremonial wording, artifacts/rituals, venue, and officiant. Level of religiosity was measured on a three-step scale:<sup>22</sup> not at all religious, somewhat religious, and very

<sup>18</sup> Rich 1980, 631–660.

<sup>19</sup> Rich 1980, 633.

<sup>20</sup> Rich 1980, 640.

<sup>21</sup> Butler 1990, 151.

<sup>22</sup> Engstrom/Semic 2003, 145–163.



religious. Wording in the ceremony (spoken by the officiant and/or bride(s)/groom) was assessed by considering phrases such as “rite”, “God”, or “Holy Spirit”. Religious artifacts and/or rituals included analysis of items and rituals such as the Christian cross or sign of the cross, the Chuppah, or “jumping the broom”. Venue was noted as either in a house of worship or in a more secular environment. Officiant was assessed by means of noting who performed the rite of marriage. If little or no religious wording or rituals/artifacts were present and the venue and officiant were secular, the wedding was not at all religious. Somewhat religious ceremonies included mention of the word God, blessings, prayers, religious wording in the vows, an identifiably religious venue (with an altar or in a place of worship), and/or a religious officiant. Ceremonies containing strong religious wording spoken by the officiant (such as “the power of God”) together with more than one religious ritual in the ceremony, a place of worship and an unmistakably religious officiant were considered very religious.

In keeping with qualitative data analysis methods, the rigorous practice of grounded theory outlined by Glaser/Strauss<sup>23</sup> and Charmaz<sup>24</sup> informed the process of understanding the roles of gender performance, gendered roles, and compulsory heterosexuality. The first step of initial coding included an open observation of the lead-up to each couple’s wedding, with a focus on women and their roles and behavior, together with each wedding ceremony. The initial reading of data in the qualitative analysis process provides a thick and rich description.<sup>25</sup> Axial coding is the next stage of the analysis, which includes sorting, synthesizing, and organization of large amounts of data.<sup>26</sup> In the present analysis, this step involved identifying themes and categories evident in each couple’s relationship, again with a focus on women, together with identifying characteristics of each wedding ceremony. Finally, theoretical coding “weaves the ... story back together” as seen in Glaser<sup>27</sup> and Charmaz.<sup>28</sup> In this project, the final stage involved comparison and consideration of roles and relationships in order to identify how *GREY’S ANATOMY* depicts women, religiosity, and weddings in contemporary culture.

23 Glaser/Strauss 1967.

24 Charmaz 2006.

25 Geertz 1973.

26 Creswell/Poth 1998, 206.

27 Glaser 1978, 72.

28 Charmaz 2006, 63.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RELIGIOSITY

Of the 14 weddings throughout 13 seasons of *GREY'S ANATOMY*, there were nine in which religiosity was able to be assessed; the remaining four wedding ceremonies were not shown in the program and thus sufficient information was not available for the purposes of assessing religiosity.

Four weddings were considered “not at all religious”: Meredith and Derek’s union via Post-it (a private and personal ceremony of commitment), Meredith and Derek’s official ceremony in a courthouse, Miranda and Ben’s nonreligious wedding, and Callie and Arizona’s same-sex wedding. These weddings had no religious rituals or artifacts and no religious wording, were not held in a religious setting, and were not officiated by a religious figure. Four weddings were considered “somewhat religious”: the ceremonies for Izzie and Alex, Christina and Preston, Amelia and Owen, and Catherine and Richard. These ceremonies included religious wording such as “ancient rite” and “blessings” (Izzie and Alex), religious rituals such as the Chuppah (Cristina and Owen), visible artifacts such as crosses in the venue (Catherine and Richard), and the couple being married by a religious officiant in a house of worship (Amelia and Owen). Only April and Matthew’s aborted wedding was considered “very religious” in its strong religious language (“God’s power” and “Heavenly Father”).

Overall, weddings featured on *GREY'S ANATOMY* can be considered religious in that they incorporate mainstream and generally expected religious elements in contemporary American ceremonies, such as holding the wedding in a house of worship, use of somewhat religious language, and the incorporation of a few religious artifacts or rituals. Interestingly, the only wedding that was considered very religious (April and Matthew’s) was called off at the altar as the love triangle involving April, Jackson, and Matthew was dramatically revealed. The two couples whose weddings were not at all religious were particularly poignant figures in the program. Meredith, focused on her career, puts little attention on religious issues and has minimal interest in planning and hosting a wedding; it was her partner, Derek, who suggested and insisted upon being married, and despite Meredith’s disinterest argues, “Well, it’s for the baby” (S7, E20). Callie and Arizona’s non-religious ceremony is important because they are the only same-sex married couple in the drama. The lack of religiosity in this ceremony between two women is reflective of the finding that same-sex weddings offer a site of resistance to social norms.<sup>29</sup> However, there are traditional elements of this wedding, such as white dresses and even a veil, together with the customary father-daughter dance. Thus we suggest

<sup>29</sup> Fetner/Heath, 2016



that while this wedding was *not religious*, this is not to suggest that it was *non-traditional*.

## GREY'S ANATOMY WEDDINGS: SUPPORTING FEMALE GENDER PERFORMANCE AND COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

All of the weddings in GREY'S ANATOMY lent at least some level of support to feminine gender performance and the social construct of compulsory heterosexuality. The main themes in this affirmation are the portrayal of a white wedding, depiction of the nervous, irrational woman obsessively planning her wedding, the inevitability of or need for a man fulfilled via marriage, and the notion of a fairytale or happy ending.

### GENDER PERFORMANCE

Most of the weddings in GREY'S ANATOMY support the traditional "femme" performance of woman. The wedding ceremonies of Izzie and Alex (S5), Cristina and Preston (S3), Miranda and Ben (S9), April and Matthew (S10), April and Jackson (S11), and Amelia and Owen (S12/13) all featured floral décor, fairy lights, and brides in white dresses. Even the wedding of Callie and Arizona (S7), the only lesbian wedding in the series, featured both women in white dresses; neither was a less feminine or "butch" partner. The concept of a woman looking feminine and beautiful, particularly on her wedding day, is of particular note. In the lead-up to Cristina's wedding with Preston (S3), Cristina's mother and future mother-in-law both demand that she looks her best and thus subject herself to beauty treatments that she would not normally receive or plan (Preston's mother insists that, in keeping with family tradition, Cristina remove her eyebrows entirely). Further, Cristina asks her friend Callie, "That last dress was okay, wasn't it? I mean, it was too tight and I couldn't breathe, but a wedding's just one day, right?" (S3, E23). It is of particular note that the "pain for beauty" trope was most forcibly imposed upon Cristina, who is arguably the least femme character in the show, given her intent not to have children and to focus exclusively on her career and also her sometimes cold and unemotional disposition.

Weddings in the program depict several women as obsessive, irrational, or overly emotional. The qualities of emotionality and obsessiveness fit with the hegemonic expectation of women as "hysterical". For example, when Izzie is planning Meredith and Derek's wedding, she is focused almost exclusively on wedding preparation and makes unreasonable demands of the couple and their friends, such as insisting that Derek try on multiple outfits in the midst of his surgical schedule and that friends stop treating patients at work to try samples of the catering. Izzie's excitement for the wedding is noted when she repeatedly



shouts, “Wedding day!” throughout Season 5, Episode 22; this obsession earns her the title “bridezilla” from her friends and colleagues. In Season 9, Episode 9, it is revealed that Miranda is a “jittery bride”, despite her lack of enthusiasm and limited involvement in planning the wedding. Irrationalism on the wedding day is shown when supporting characters assess the brides as “crazy”, such as when April is convinced that seeing her future husband, Matthew, before the wedding is bad luck, and when Amelia believes that her wedding is doomed because it is raining. The notion of female hysteria as inherent to being female is part of the hegemonic understanding of being a woman. This social role has been challenged by feminists<sup>30</sup> and redefined as a form of patriarchy, oppression, and male domination. Despite the strides made in feminist scholarship and activism, this popular drama demonstrates that the image of the overly emotional, irrational woman is still perpetuated in contemporary culture.

#### COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

Although a lesbian wedding is featured in *GREY’S ANATOMY*, the program lends notable support to Rich’s concept of compulsory heterosexuality.<sup>31</sup> We argue that the lesbian characters and plotlines in the program are not enough to significantly challenge patriarchy to the point that the concept, at least in this program, is threatened. The “inevitability of marriage”,<sup>32</sup> together with submission to a man and his leadership, is clearly discernible in *GREY’S ANATOMY*’s weddings. For example, both Meredith and Cristina, despite their focus on and dedication to career, get married to satisfy external factors rather than their own personal wishes. Meredith feels no need or desire to formalize her relationship with Derek via marriage but is convinced to do so as a prerequisite for being the mother of Zola, the Malawian child that the couple adopts. Similarly, Cristina feels that in order to support and satisfy the wishes of her colleague and mentor Preston Burke, she needs to accept his proposal and marry him. Preston clearly outlines Cristina’s submission to him in Season 3, Episode 23: “[Cristina] hates change. I lead. I have to. And then she’s grateful.” The notion that men’s status is superior to women’s is also clear when Callie reports that she feels “weird” working with her intern and husband, George, because “I’m his boss and his wife” (S3, E15). The acquiescence and notion of submissiveness on the parts of each of these women indicate the inevitability of attachment to men even when women do not want it; thus marriage becomes an “unsatisfying and oppressive [component] of their lives”.<sup>33</sup>

30 Cixous/Clement, 1975.

31 Rich 1980, 631–660.

32 Rich 1980, 631–660.

33 Rich 1980, 640.

The “need” for marriage is another important theme in endorsing compulsory heterosexuality in this program. As a Christian, April firmly believes that sex should only be enjoyed within the confines of marriage, thus necessitating her union with Jackson, with whom she regrets losing her virginity. Further, as a respected and busy surgeon, Miranda struggles with being a single parent and views her marriage to Ben as providing a father figure for her young son, Tucker, and a parenting and household partner for herself. The program lends support to the cultural truth that having a marital partner is the most economically and socially effective familial structure. The need for marriage in order to both create and maintain the nuclear family is portrayed in these situations, thus endorsing the notion of compulsory heterosexuality.

### GREY’S ANATOMY WEDDINGS: CHALLENGING FEMALE GENDER PERFORMANCE AND COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

The portrayal of weddings in GREY’S ANATOMY does a great deal to challenge both feminine gender performance and the social construct of compulsory heterosexuality. The main themes in the subversion of expected gender performance are seen in the characters’ disinterest in a “white wedding” and the importance of career over marriage. Compulsory heterosexuality is clearly rejected when no woman in the program adopts a partner’s surname and when marriage is perceived as a contract rather than a traditionally gendered fairy-tale.

#### GENDER PERFORMANCE

While nearly all of the weddings portrayed on GREY’S ANATOMY featured performance in a white dress, the exceptions are meaningful in considering how “woman” is played out in this program. Most notably, lead character Meredith is unenthusiastic about hosting a wedding and loathes the notion of being a traditional bride. She openly tells her future husband, Derek, “I’m not really a church-wedding bride or a poufy white dress bride” (S5, E20). Even though Izzie is planning Meredith and Derek’s wedding for them and Meredith does not have to worry about the details, she resists the notion of a traditional wedding: “Now I have to go home and put on a corset and pantyhose and a petticoat and look like one of those idiots on top of a wedding cake” (S5, E22). When Meredith and Derek eventually get married legally at City Hall, they “didn’t have time to get rings” (S7, E20), again rejecting traditional expectations. Further, well before the City Hall wedding, Meredith and Derek draft their promises to one another on a blue Post-it, sign it, and consider themselves married. Meredith’s rejection of attention and celebrated femininity, together with her disinterest



in planning a wedding, is clearly an interpretation of gender as Meredith wants to perform it. Given Meredith's role as the lead character in this long-running series, her rejection of hegemonic gender roles is of particular importance.

Meredith's best friend Cristina, when marrying colleague Owen, also rejects the "white wedding" trope. Cristina chooses a red wedding dress, arguing that wearing white is "sexist and vaguely racist" (S7, E1). Even when preparing to marry Preston, Cristina suggests her rejection of the white wedding: "I'm gonna like being married. It's the wedding part that's ridiculous" (S3, E25). This rejection of the "big wedding" and "big day" themes associated with female gender performance is meaningful in that Cristina also demonstrates the ability to design her own version of gender performance in a way that works for her.

Four of the weddings in *GREY'S ANATOMY* are either delayed or postponed because of professional priorities. For example, in Season 5, Episode 24, patients' surgeries take priority over Meredith's planned City Hall wedding. Derek suggests, "Look, we could do this another day", to which Meredith replies, "I love you, and I do want to marry you today. But there is no time." This indicates Meredith's feelings that the wedding is simply a formality. Similarly, on the day of Cristina's wedding (S3, E25), Cristina does not rush to get to her own wedding after a scheduled surgery: "Oh, crap. I'm gonna be late for my own wedding." Miranda, too, forgets that she has her ceremony to attend because she is performing a surgery (S9, E10). It is also telling that Catherine and Richard postpone their entire wedding in order to help with a trauma; Catherine suggests that the catering be redirected to the hospital and served to medical staff (S11, E23). Gender performance that prioritizes career over marriage is anathema to the traditional performance of woman, in which the bride is focused on her appearance and wedding ceremony. The weddings which were delayed, interrupted, or lost on account of the woman's professional priorities indicate a challenge of hegemonic gender roles and suggest a redefinition of gender performance with an increased focus on career and work.

#### COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

Perhaps the most obvious challenge to the notion of compulsory heterosexuality is that none of the women who get married in *GREY'S ANATOMY* take the surname of their partner; this is true for all of the heterosexual marriages as well as the same-sex wedding in the program. There are only two weddings in all of the 13 seasons in which taking the surname of the marital partner is addressed. First, after Callie and George had eloped in Las Vegas (S3, E14), Callie returned to Seattle, and her peers began to taunt her by calling her "Callie O'Malley". The moniker does not last longer than three episodes, and Callie is called Dr. Torres for the rest of her tenure on the show. Second, when Cristina is preparing to marry Preston Burke, Preston's mother, Jane, tells Cristina, "Five generations of



Burke women have worn this [necklace] on their wedding day. It's a way of joining the family, becoming a Burke" (S3, E25). Cristina replies, "... a Burke." This exchange clearly indicates that Cristina has no intention of becoming "a Burke". In depicting 14 marriages in which none of the women change their surnames, *GREY'S ANATOMY* rejects the notion of compulsory heterosexuality in which a woman submits to her husband (or partner) by taking a new surname and thus assuming at least part of his identity. Rather, the program maintains women's identities as professionals and birth names of all women in the program remain intact.

The notion of compulsory heterosexuality is also challenged by brides in the program when they assert that marriage is not a fairytale but rather a contract. Meredith, for example, clearly perceives her formal wedding as planned by Izzie, her marriage via Post-it, and the City Hall ceremony as simple legalities. Meredith tells Cristina, "I'm getting married today. Mhm. City Hall. No muss, no fuss, just quick and dirty" (S5, E24). The notion of the fairytale wedding which is fussed over and planned is not part of Meredith's desire or intention. Similarly, Catherine and Richard enter their engagement knowing that marriage is "a merger, it's a contract" (S11, E22). Perhaps the most blatant rejection of the inevitability and female "need" for marriage is the union between Teddy, a cardiothoracic specialist, and Henry, a patient; the two are married with the purpose of ensuring Henry receives Teddy's health insurance. This fulfills none of Teddy's material needs and is a contract which serves only Henry. This subversion of the female "requirement" for marriage is a clear rejection of compulsory heterosexuality as Rich outlines it.<sup>34</sup> These weddings reject the notion that women need, desire, and seek heterosexual marriage for economic and social protection.

## CONCLUSION

As a highly recognized and markedly successful television drama, *GREY'S ANATOMY* contains a depiction of both gender performance and compulsory heterosexuality, together with the important cultural event of the wedding, that offers a significant contribution to contemporary television culture. This theoretically and methodologically synthetic study<sup>35</sup> combined communication theories, women's and gender studies, and grounded theory based qualitative data analysis.

*GREY'S ANATOMY* exhibits a lack of consistency in its portrayal of gender performance, compulsory heterosexuality, and religion – there is no singular mes-

<sup>34</sup> Rich 1980, 631–660.

<sup>35</sup> Lotz/Ross 2007, 185–202.

sage about how to be a woman or how to get married. These portrayals may be considered dissonant in that they lack uniformity, as the program does not offer a streamlined view of gender performance, what it means to be heterosexual or homosexual, or how these performances play into religious weddings. Even singular characters simultaneously exhibit elements of heteronormativity and challenge compulsory heterosexual expectations and patriarchal constraints (for example, Callie is a same-sex bride, yet wears a white dress; Meredith rejects the poufy wedding and focuses on her career, yet wants to acknowledge herself as a wife and mother). While this dissonance is evident, we argue that the lack of constancy in how to perform as a woman, together with diversity in both heteronormative and homosexual weddings, can be considered a strength in this scripted drama. The complexity in expression for women in a variety of situations is arguably a reflection of how women must constantly navigate the rigors of personal expression and cultural acceptance in contemporary culture. This struggle is consistent with Butler's argument<sup>36</sup> that women ought to be able to perform "woman" in whatever way they wish, yet in order to be understood as a sexed and gendered individual, one must inhabit at least some of the norms associated with gender identity.<sup>37</sup> This tension between wanting to perform as one wishes (such as Meredith telling her partner, Derek, that she's not a "church-wedding" bride) and how one's culture expects one to perform (such as being married before adopting a child) is dynamic and, we argue, portrayed in a way that is illustrative of Butler's description of the complexities of gender performance.

The tension in navigating both resistance and compliance to compulsory heterosexuality is evident in *GREY'S ANATOMY*, and we also suggest that the program's depiction is a robust interpretation of the contemporary struggle for many women as professionals and/or as lesbians. The program is one of the first mainstream scripted dramas to depict a lesbian wedding and certainly one of the few that do not fall victim to "dead lesbian syndrome"<sup>38</sup> or the "bury your gays" trope.<sup>39</sup> Television narratives in which gays and lesbians die have been used since 1976 for shock value; by 2016, there had been 166 queer female television characters who died,<sup>40</sup> a number which is arguably more shocking than the narrative itself.<sup>41</sup> Thus, *GREY'S ANATOMY* makes strides for LGBTQ+ representation, although it is still bound by Rich's concept of compulsory heterosexuality:<sup>42</sup>

36 Butler 1990.

37 Butler 2009, i–xiii.

38 Bradley 2016.

39 Waggoner 2017, 1–15.

40 Riese 2016.

41 Waggoner, 2017.

42 Rich 1980, 631–660.



the brides both wear white and enjoy a ceremony which is similar to a heteronormative wedding in all ways except in having two brides.

The interplay amongst gender performance, feminism, sexuality, and religion in *GREY'S ANATOMY* is particularly visible in the weddings depicted in the drama. An equal number of weddings were not at all religious and somewhat religious, while only one was considered very religious (and it was aborted at the altar). All of the female characters are both career-focused and feminist; thus it cannot be argued that a feminist framework or personal outlook is likely to result in a particular degree of religiosity in a wedding. Further, the one same-sex marriage, while not religious per se, is nevertheless notably traditional in its incorporation of white dresses, vows, the father-daughter dance, a veil, and rings. Overall, *GREY'S ANATOMY* pays particular attention to "tradition" in its depiction of weddings, without necessarily including religious elements. The perpetuation of the "white wedding" trope in this program is in keeping with Ingraham's media analysis<sup>43</sup> which suggests that the image of the white wedding has become a powerful symbol of heteronormativity and traditional gender arrangements. We therefore suggest that a traditional wedding does not necessarily imply that it is religious in tone or purpose. Rather, a wedding which holds to traditional elements and expectations adheres to the idealized image of a bride in a white dress with a "perfect" day. Yet in contrast to Ingraham's argument, this analysis shows that *GREY'S ANATOMY* does very little to reinforce gender hierarchies given its unmistakable depiction of strong female characters together with a married lesbian couple.

Exceptions to the traditional wedding trope are the two weddings of Meredith and Derek, who in both instances reject both religiosity and tradition. Again, this demonstrates that *GREY'S ANATOMY* does not build upon the heteronormative narrative in which gender roles are traditional and enforced. It would have been particularly interesting for viewers to have seen the wedding of April and Jackson, which was presented in the program as a flashback, without vows or details indicating the level of religiosity. This lack of detail meant this wedding could not be included in our analysis. Had this wedding been shown, it would have helped to illustrate the coexistence of tradition and religiosity in the wedding of a career-focused female with a strong religious background.

In sum, the sociocultural expectations of gender performance and the pervasive notion of compulsory heterosexuality as demonstrated in *GREY'S ANATOMY* indicate tension and dissonance in individuals, groups, and scripted drama situations. This analysis is consistent with Butler's arguments<sup>44</sup> that gender performance, while theoretically up to the individual, demands a particular level of

<sup>43</sup> Ingraham 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Butler 1990; Butler, 2009, i–xiii.



conformity in order to reach sociocultural acceptance. While both contemporary culture and this program have progress to make in terms of accepting and depicting unconventional gender performances and confidently rejecting heteronormativity, the professionally strong, socially confident characters in the program are overall in keeping with the feminist agenda. When best friends in the program tell each other, “You’re my person”, they are not referring only to their friendship; they are redefining and reinventing how both men and women can interact and rely on one another, specifically in a way that is unique, indomitable, and intentionally challenging.

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Arno Haldemann

## Charivari or the Historicising of a Question

### The Irrelevance of Romantic Love for the Audio-Visual Performance of Marriage in Bern in the 18th and 19th Centuries

#### ABSTRACT

Citing Oscar Wilde, in their call for papers the editors of this volume ask the question “Who, being loved, is poor?” On a meta-theoretical level, this article seeks to contextualize this question and its citation socially. On an empirical level, it contrasts the socially highly determined question and its implicit presuppositions with the findings of a local case study from the canton of Bern in the 18th and 19th centuries. When we examine precarious marriages through petitions for dispensation from the preacher’s threefold reading of the banns from the pulpit, the collective audio-visual dimension of marriages in an agrarian society with scarce resources becomes apparent. With the petitions, the couples tried to avoid attention and thus escape the communal tribunal of a charivari and the like. In Bern, the material and media dimension of weddings were largely governed by local standards. Charivaris were audio-visual means for society to communicate shared values regarding marriage. An expression of the locally accentuated moral economy, they did not reflect romantic ideals of love. The performance of weddings as large and public rituals was a communal compulsion rather than the expression of an individualistic and therefore creative event. The performative wedding as the epitome of individualism is a very young historical development and strongly linked to a late-modern bourgeois culture of singularity.

#### KEYWORDS

Oscar Wilde, Bern, Charivari, marriage, romantic love, bourgeoisie culture, individualism, intimacy, agrarian society, collective performance, codes of communication

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Arno Haldemann received his education in history and religious studies at the Universities of Bern and at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) in Paris. In his PhD project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, he is researching the genesis of civil marriage in the Swiss Canton of Bern between 1742 and 1865. He focuses on the interaction of deviant subaltern actors wanting to get married, resistive local communities, families and corporations and the arbitrating Bernese marriage tribunal. Thus, he investigates the interrelation of actor’s agency, communal customary legal and moral concepts and contemporary population policy. Arno Haldemann is a member of the Graduate School of the Humanities at the Walter Benjamin Kolleg of the University of Bern.

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## INTRODUCTION

In their call for papers, the editors of this volume cite Oscar Wilde as they ask a wide-reaching question: “Who, being loved, is poor?” For a postmodern historian, this instantly and inevitably becomes a twofold question: what kind of love did Wilde intend and why do the editors refer to it? As the call’s eponymous question encompasses different temporal levels, the answer should be historically nuanced and socially differentiated. For this reason, I will focus on three questions: (1) what does the question tell us about its famous originator, his socialization, and the social field he was participating in, or, in other words, how would Wilde have understood his own question? (2) what does the use of this question tell us about the editors who refer to the famous playwright in their call for papers for a contemporary scholarly journal and about those who perceive the reference and answer it? While the first two questions will be explored on a meta-theoretical level, I want to answer a third question on the basis of empirical data from a case study from the canton of Bern. Notwithstanding its peculiarities, in this article Bern represents a relatively arbitrarily selected place at the centre of Europe during the transition from the 18th to the 19th century. The majority of the populace in this city-state were agrarian and rural. So, (3) how would actors in this society have answered Wilde’s question? In my response to this third question, I hope to advance to the very core of this call for papers. I will demonstrate the irrelevance of Wilde’s intentions in his question for the audio-visual and material dimensions of the marriage rituals of Bern’s agrarian majority in its transition from early modern times to modernity proper. I will put forward the argument that certainly in this part of Europe, and likely elsewhere too, a large part of the population would never have considered Wilde’s question. Perhaps, however, they would have asked the inverse question, “Who, being poor, is loved?”, and, more fundamentally, “What is love?”

## THE BOURGEOIS BIAS OF ROMANTIC MARRIAGE

Wilde was the son of a renowned medical doctor who had been educated in the humanities. His mother was an equally educated translator and poet who operated a well-known salon. He was descended from a quasi ideal-typical bourgeois background.<sup>2</sup> In his mother’s social circles the very young Wilde had contact

- 1 If the editors searched for a reference frame for this hypothetical question, for better or worse they would have encountered Haddaway’s eponymous pop song. This reference would possibly not have sat so easily in the academic and intellectual milieu of the editors as does the citation from Oscar Wilde, but it would have more likely corresponded with the folk culture of the subaltern actors I investigate in my study.
- 2 The term “bourgeois” is used here for want of a better translation of the German *bürgerlich*. The term “bourgeois” denotes here a specific life style “with an emphasis on personal education and political participation. As such, *bürgerlich* has a positively connoted discursive tradition and breadth of mean-



with famous contemporary artists and intellectuals of Dublin's local scene. He thus received "the socialization of artists".<sup>3</sup> He enjoyed an outstanding education in classical philology. As a student, he became a member of a freemasons' lodge.<sup>4</sup> Wilde is to be viewed as an integral part of "the artistic field", the very specific element of modern society which Andreas Reckwitz sees as responsible for the formation of the creativity *dispositif*.<sup>5</sup> The successful but controversial author was not just a prominent but formative part of the contemporary artistic avant-garde. He paradigmatically embodied dandyism in his time. Wilde was an outstanding representative of literary aestheticism, and his whole existence must be attributed to the modern "aesthetic of genius".<sup>6</sup> Retrospectively he can appear as the personified icon of individualism.<sup>7</sup>

This individualistic aestheticization drew from the concept of romantic love, in which English sentimentalism played a crucial role.<sup>8</sup> The sentimentalist ideal of love became central, albeit in reconstructed form, to Wilde's own iterations of love.<sup>9</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a critical backlash against "aristocratic and agrarian traditionalism" had culminated in the romantic novel and theatre. Thus, a normative concept of romantic love became a constitutive part of "bourgeois modernity", which structured Europe's 19th century socio-culturally.<sup>10</sup>

Wilde's play *A Woman of No Importance* revolves around romantic love, by which the self-determining bourgeoisie appears to have distinguished itself from the aristocracy. The question we are exploring is posed in the fourth act by the bourgeois character Miss Hester Worsley and refers to a historically specific emanation of love. This love dissociated itself from traditional and aristocratic forms of convenient love, but it stemmed from a thin, privileged and elitist social stratum, in which at the time it was exclusively disseminated.<sup>11</sup> The bourgeois *dispositif* of romantic culture raised passionate love to its own end. Thus, passionate love became the essence of the modern marital relationship. Henceforth, according to the ideal of romantic love, no one was to marry for convenience; one should marry for "pure", which is to say self-referential and

ing that none of the usual translations – 'bourgeois', 'middle class' and 'citizen' or 'civil society' – can do justice to", Reckwitz 2017, 33.

3 Reckwitz 2017, 38.

4 Ellmann 1988, 3–50.

5 Reckwitz 2017, 33–37.

6 For the genesis of the aesthetic of genius cf. Reckwitz 2017, 38.

7 On Wilde's (self-)iconization cf. Reckwitz 2017, 160–162.

8 Luhmann 1986, 145.

9 Wilde not only adapted this ideal in his writings but also integrated it into his personal life: "Wilde wanted a consuming passion; he got it and was consumed by it", Ellmann 1988, 362. At a certain point in his life, he lived out his homosexual love relatively openly, which was not "convenient" for his contemporaries at all; see Ellmann 1988, 258–262.

10 Reckwitz 2017, 202–203.

11 On the genesis of romantic love see Giddens 1992, 38–41, and Luhmann 1986, 129–144.



unique, love. As a result, love came to be thought of as something singular, self-determined, individual, and liberal, as a matter between two individuals who established family and household on the basis of romantic love. Strategic, material, and political points of reference were either veiled by bourgeois feelings or became irrelevant because both parties were likely from the same privileged social class. This is exactly the reason that Hester responds to her own question (“Who, being loved, is poor?”) with a romantic answer: “Oh, no one. I hate my riches. They are a burden.”<sup>12</sup> Only her bourgeois material status allows her to conceive romantic love as a true emotional luxury and, therefore, material riches as a burden. She does not realize that wealth and social status are the constitutive preconditions for her subjective feelings. She cannot recognize that the script for her own play is already socially determined. In this context, the answer to Wilde’s question may well be “almost no one” or perhaps “not many”, but with a concept of wealth in mind completely different from that held by Hester. A person of the 18th or 19th century normally had to be wealthy and to belong to a sophisticated bourgeois milieu if that person was to have the luxury of marrying romantically, and therefore purposelessly and individually. If that wealth was in the form of financial security, it was possible to take passionate love as the fundament of marriage and conceive it as true riches. Romantic love was a privilege of wealthy and thus closed social circles whose existence was neither dependent on the agrarian or industrial-labour context nor defined by the Sisyphean struggle for security.

That *homines academici*<sup>13</sup> should take up Wilde’s question and use it as the point at issue in their call for papers is not surprising if one follows Andreas Reckwitz’s theory on the invention of creativity: we have a tendency to be Wilde’s epigones in relation to our individualism and socialization. The bourgeois and avant-garde Wilde can be interpreted as a pioneer of our own contemporary urban middle-class culture, in which “ideas and practices from former oppositional cultures and subcultures have now achieved hegemony”.<sup>14</sup> In that culture, creativity that is directed at singularity seems inevitable and characteristic. This might explain the editors’ hypothesis as to why “many couples are looking for alternative expressions of the wedding ritual”: modern lovers are on a compulsive quest for an unconventional, outstanding, and singular audio-visual and material performance of their unique love in their very individual marriage. The use of Wilde’s question confirms him as a reference point of our own bourgeois

<sup>12</sup> Wilde 1969, 173.

<sup>13</sup> In his study *Homo Academicus*, Pierre Bourdieu depicts the social constellation of the academic community and establishes “the proportion of sons of farm workers... [is] smaller in the population of the ‘powerful’, whereas the proportion of sons of primary teachers, craftsmen and tradesmen and above all the sons of businessmen is much greater”, Bourdieu 1988, 78.

<sup>14</sup> Reckwitz 2017, 4.

culture. This culture assumes that marriages “have become events, a big business with fairs, wedding planners and specific products for the special day(s)” for reasons of individualism.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the intensely loving and unique marrying couple come into focus in a romantically staged wedding that celebrates and exhibits their private happiness and intimate feelings. The wedding’s uniqueness is made public to showcase the couple’s private bliss. Only the romantic and allegedly individual consensus of the lovers shall be constitutive for the accomplishment of the marriage. Social prosperity as a fundamental precondition for this kind of individualistic and love-centred marriage is disguised by romantic feelings.

## MARRIAGE AS A COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCE

In my current research I investigate precarious marriage aspirations in the canton of Bern during the “Sattelzeit” (Reinhart Koselleck), the pivotal age between 1750 and 1850. I use the term “precarious marriage aspirations” to refer to conjugal liaisons which arose from controversial marital intentions, marriages that accorded with the dictionary definition of “precarious” in being “not securely held or in position; dangerously likely to fall or collapse”. The precariousness of these marriages derived from their specific social, generational, economic, or confessional configuration, which deviated from the prevalent local customs. Thus, the right to marry was, as the dictionary definition of precarious requires, “dependent on chance” and had to be “obtained by entreaty”.<sup>16</sup> Precarious marriages had to fight against societal impediments and opposition. Hence, they elucidate that marriages were certainly not an individualistic event in this transitional period in the 18th and 19th centuries, but were involuntarily yet attentively monitored, controlled, and, if necessary, collectively disciplined events in the local community.<sup>17</sup>

An optimal way to approach exemplary precarious marriages in the canton of Bern in this period is to analyse contemporary petitions as historical sources.<sup>18</sup> In these petitions, which requested dispensation from the preacher’s reading of the banns from the pulpit on three occasions, the fear of becoming the object of public attention and, therefore, of a “rough music” or a *charivari* is implicit. The threefold banns reading, legally codified and obligatory for the canton of

<sup>15</sup> See the call for papers for the current issue of this journal.

<sup>16</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/precarious> [accessed 13 September 2018].

<sup>17</sup> Coontz 2014, 5–9.

<sup>18</sup> In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Bern and the rest of the aristocratic-ruled ancient Swiss Federation were occupied by the Napoleonic army. The French imposed a centralised republic. The strongly Napoleonically influenced Helvetic Republic confirmed the right to petition by constitution. Thus, a torrent of individual petitions from all cantons reached the executive authority, although the practice of petitioning had already existed under the *Ancien Régime*.



Bern as well as the rest of the Helvetic Republic, enabled communal control of marital affairs and the rejection of an intended marriage. The banns served as the official public announcement of an intention to marry, made to the parish during the Sunday service. Their reading was intended to avert clandestine marriages undertaken against the will of the families involved and against corporative and communal interests. Dispensation from the reading of the banns was an exemption accorded patricians in this corporative society. Subaltern couples used such petitions to try to avoid attention and thus escape the communal tribunal. The usually public wedding would then be inverted into a private affair. The ritualised and public reproach of a *charivari* and the like “usually directed [audio-visually and violently expressed] mockery or hostility against individuals who offended against certain community norms”.<sup>19</sup> Because of their socio-economical configurations, precarious marriages endangered communal material resources and threatened both customary law and the common ethic. Thus, they adversely affected the prevalent moral economy.<sup>20</sup> The petitions reveal actors who were part of precarious relational configurations and urged the authorities to exclude the public reading of the banns from the pulpit to allow for a more intimate or even secret event.

An example for this finding is the case of petitioner Johannes Hermann and his wife-to-be. Hermann, a master stocking weaver resident in Bern who had been widowed for 20 years, wanted to marry the recently widowed and elderly Catharina Labhardt, who was not a resident of Bern. Because the remarriage of widowers essentially made the redistribution of property less probable and diminished the marriage opportunities for those who were as yet unmarried, Labhardt would be seen as endangering local communal resources. Impediments to marriage, financial resources, and the high age of marital majority all strongly limited the reservoir of eligible women and men. “To avoid the bothersome public gossip at such events”, the couple appealed to the republican government for suspension of the requirement that the banns be read publicly from the pulpit.<sup>21</sup> Evidently not only invited guests were present at early modern marriages but also curious, gossiping, and backbiting spectators – whether one wanted them to be there or not. They threatened the bridal couple with infamy and thus with the loss of the early modern symbolic capital of honour and respectability.<sup>22</sup> Another example is provided by a pastor and petitioner “who to avoid sensation wishes to be able to marry without preceding three-time proc-

<sup>19</sup> Thompson 1992, 3.

<sup>20</sup> On the concept of the moral economy see Thompson 1971, 76–136.

<sup>21</sup> “Zu Vermeidung des ärgerlichen Publikums-Geschwäzes bey dergleichen Anlässen”, BAR Bo#1000/1483#490\* 1802–1803, 501–502.

<sup>22</sup> On the sociological concept of honour as a symbolic capital see Bourdieu 1979, 95–132. On the concept of honour in early modern societies see Schreiner/Schwerhoff 1995, 2; Dinges 1994, 144; Backmann/Ecker-Offenhäusser 1998.



lamation of the banns”.<sup>23</sup> With his request the pastor, a member of the middle class living in the agrarian context of face-to-face communities, indicated that he was by no means eager for the “big event” mentioned in the editors’ call for this issue. He wished rather for discretion and privacy. These couples were not interested in an “alternative expression of the wedding ritual”, but instead hoped that the expression of their deviant marital relationship would be as quiet as possible, even invisible.<sup>24</sup> Another churchman, a preacher who declared himself “peu fortuné”, suggesting he was destitute, and “a friend of silence and calm” petitioned “to avoid noise and scandal that ordinarily accompanies this kind of [sacred] ceremony”.<sup>25</sup> Abraham Puenzieux and Susanna Marie Vielland also hoped for dispensation from the need to have the banns read from the pulpit: “His reasons are the following, he fears a charivari, nocturnal celebrations which are ordinarily accompanied in the parish by scandals and caricatures”.<sup>26</sup> In their common petition Albrecht Salchli, a councillor, and his fiancée asked for it to be possible for them to marry “with neither pageantry, nor being accompanied by a charivari or being announced with gunshots”, because this was often the initiation of “real misfortune”.<sup>27</sup>

While many couples in the sources consulted do not name the reasons for their apprehension,<sup>28</sup> Daniel Moser, father of bride-to-be Elisabeth, states them openly: he had promised his daughter to a local man of his own agrarian home town, but in the meantime his daughter had become engaged to another man from a different community. Now this wedding was approaching. In such circumstances, the petitioner said, it was a “silly rural custom of the wedding night, to give a charivari to a woman who does not get married to a local by staging her transfer of the trousseau”.<sup>29</sup> How such a charivari was performed, we learn from a contemporary travel report on the Bernese Oberland: the transfer of the trousseau from the bride’s home to the home of the newlywed couple was enacted in a parody by unmarried men from the bride’s hometown. This simulation was accompanied by clanging cowbells and other noises, produced by whips, pipes, horns, kettles and canes. Equipped with the improvised

23 “der, um Aufsehen zu vermeiden, sich ohne eine vorhergegangene dreymahlige Verkündigung verheyrathen zu können wünscht”, BAR Bo#1000/1483#490\* 1802–1803, 111.

24 See the call for papers for this issue.

25 “ami de la tranquillité & calme”; “d’éviter par là le bruit & l’éclat qui accompagnent ordinairement cette espèce [sacrée] de cérémonies”, BAR Bo#1000/1483#490\* 1802–1803, 267.

26 “Ses motifs sont décisifs, il craint un charivari, fetes nocturnes qui sont ordinairement accompagnier dans la Paroisse de scandales et de caricatures”, BAR Bo#1000/1483#490\* 1802–1803, 493.

27 “ohne geprüng, ohne mit chari vari begleitet, noch mit feur-geschoss angekündet zu warden; wirklich ohn-glück”, BAR Bo#1000/1483#604\* 1798–1801, 163–165.

28 In the five-year period from 1798 to 1803, more than 150 petitions from residents of Bern addressed the central government; these documents form the empirical material for my investigation.

29 “ländlicher unsinniger Gebrauch [...], dass in der Hochzeitnacht einer Weibsperson die sich nicht mit einem Ortsbürger verehelichet, ein Charivarii gegeben oder welches nemlich bedeutet das Trossel geführt wird”, BAR Bo#1000/1483#604\* 1798–1801, 423.

instruments, the entourage of young, unmarried men raucously made their way to the couple's new domicile. To remain incognito, the participants were often disguised. They sometimes resorted to violence with "sooty cloth and rags on rods" against rubberneckers or relatives or turned their improvised weapons on the exterior of the houses.<sup>30</sup> Those latter circumstances probably induced Moser to comment that "misfortune" (*Unglück*) could often emerge during the transfer of the trousseau from one house to the other. Hence, "to avoid all unpleasant consequences, one wished to have this marriage blessed in the greatest possible peace".<sup>31</sup>

Another man was afraid of the threatening "caricatures and antics" (*Karikaturen und Possen*) his unmarried masculine peers in the community might perform because of his deviant marriage aspiration.<sup>32</sup> In his petition for dispensation from the banns, he recorded in writing his fear of becoming the victim of mockery and pranks on account of his wanting to marry the widow of a deceased relative. Antics sometimes involved audio-visual accompaniments to marriages which deliberately subverted social roles and customs. The carnivalesque performances of the unmarried men corresponded with a mock trial (*Narrengerichte*) and the Feast of Fools, which acted out the supposedly perverted reality to atone for it publicly.<sup>33</sup> They were generally staged at the end of a cacophonous procession. Another contemporary travel report gives us insight into a specific enactment of such a carnivalesque play: "At the destination they build a circle; the rough music comes to an end; impromptu some wanton pranksters hold farcical speeches, whose content one can guess." If the bride was pregnant before the marriage, this was indicated with a straw puppet. This puppet was either raised on a rod to make it visible to the whole carnival community or else the charivari's participants would "bring it along in a baby cradle, rock it and sing to it". If the bridal couple was poor, "the moody guests trade in cattle or cheese with feigned sincerity, milk the cows while imitating the sound, or pretend to offer the bridal couple very generous gifts for the dowry". When the antics were over, the whole flock returned home "with unruly laughter and noise".<sup>34</sup>

30 "berusste[n] Lumpen und Lappen an Stangen", Wyss 1816–17, 1, 335. For reports of similar rituals cf. Klapisch-Zuber 1987.

31 "wünschte man zu Ausweichung aller unangenehmen Folgen, dass diese Ehe in möglicher Stille eingeseget würde", BAR Bo#1000/1483#604\* 1798–1801, 423.

32 BAR Bo#1000/1483#604\* 1798–1801, 323.

33 Davis 1971, 41–75; Ingram 2004, 288–308; Hoffmann-Krayer 1904, 85–86; "Autor/in" 2015, 442.

34 "Am Orte der Bestimmung wird ein Kreis gebildet; die rasende Musik nimmt ein Ende; und aus dem Stegreife halten ein paar muthwillige Lecker spasshafte Reden, deren Inhalt sich errathen lässt; bringt sie in einer Wiege daher, wiegt sie und singt dazu; handeln die launichten [sic] Gäste mit verstelltem Ernst um Vieh oder Käs, melken mit nachahmendem Geräusch die Kühe, oder machen den Hochzeitleuten zum Schein recht grosse Geschenke zur Aussteuer; mit unbändigem Lachen und Lärmen", Wyss 1816–1817, 1:335–336.



All these examples are about specific and concrete contemporary marriage constellations. There might be local differences in the way a charivari was delivered, but it always accomplished a similar function.<sup>35</sup> It constituted a collectively performed, communicative action of punishment. Its purpose was to denounce deviant behaviour by certain members of the community in a visible way and to that end it was accompanied by a lot of noise. It was intended to penalize deviating members, but also to reintegrate the violators of the social order. Thus, the collective conventions could be reinforced and the social order restored. Charivaris were the early modern audio-visual media *per se*. A community simultaneously sought to affirm and impose its norms visibly and audibly on its members. Abstract social codes found their physical expression in the performances of the charivari, which were visible, noisy, and sometimes even tangible.<sup>36</sup> For example, Moser neglected the prevalent local preference for endogamy with his daughter's marriage arrangement. By breaking his promise to a local, he also broke with the moral economy. Endogamy served the preservation of local resources and therefore was not to be disregarded. Moser experienced first-hand the physically painful consequences of the performative expression even before the upcoming marriage of his daughter: he was "battered in his own home in the cruellest way".<sup>37</sup> Thus, Moser had already been warned what would happen if the wedding of his daughter were to take place publically.

## CONCLUSION

The examples presented in this article have shown the tension between the dominant performance of marriages, on one hand, and individual orientations towards romantic love in Switzerland in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century, on the other. At least in Bern's agrarian society with scarce resources, which despite nascent industrialization was still typical for the majority of the population in this period, weddings were largely governed by local collective standards. The audio-visual performances around precarious marriages were neither intimate nor individualistic but carried by common symbolic communication. This collective action reflected not romantic ideals of love, but the locally accentuated moral economy. In contrast to Wilde's bourgeois circles, in such an agrarian community adherence to these specific moral values seemed crucial for its functioning and, as such, its existence. These values had to be brought to mind repeatedly and kept up relentlessly by means of audio-visual perfor-

35 On the evidence of the regional diversity of charivari, rough music etc. see Thompson 1993, 467–533; «Autor/in» 2015, 441–443.

36 «Autor/in» 2015, 435–439; Eibach 2011, 627–644; Scharfe 1970, 186–190.

37 "in seinem eigenen Haus auf das grausamste thätlich mishandelt", BAR Bo#1000/1483#604\* 1798–1801, 423.



mance. Collective economic and material resources, including eligible men and women, were essential to the agrarian community. They had to be preserved internally and protected against threats. Rituals of consensus provided a key means by which such threats were held at bay. Charivaris were the audio-visual means for the society to communicate shared values in- and outwardly.

People contravening local norms in the agrarian realm of scarce resources chose petitioning to avoid the publicity and extravagant festivities of a big event. Whether undertaken for material calculations or for the historically relatively recent notion of pure and unique romantic love, these deviant marriages represented a fundamental threat to the agrarian collective society. As the petitions illuminated, the precarious bridal couple feared becoming victims of a charivari, which raised the risk of noise, physical violence, mockery, defamation, and loss of honour.

According to Luhmann, “it is common sociological knowledge that the communal living conditions of past social orders left little leeway for intimate relationships”.<sup>38</sup> The generalization of love as code of communication<sup>39</sup> found its respective expression in the performance of intimate relationships in big events like extravagant wedding rituals. The broader diffusion of the emotional luxury of love matches was bound to capitalistic preconditions, which were a shared bourgeois wealth that came from trade, speculation, bureaucracy, science, art, or inheritance and that could provide relief from the hard, collective, and existential context of agrarian labour in fields, woods, and stables. At least for Switzerland, the respective structural preconditions for love based individualistic marriages were not available to the masses until the end of the 19th century.

Finally, an interesting detail should not be left unmentioned. In 1790, in a single breath the Bernese ancien régime renewed the obligation for the three-time publication of the banns for non-patricians and confirmed the old patrician exemption from publication of the banns. Right after the short republican intermezzo known as the *Helvetik* (1798–1803), the old patrician elites, again in power after the end of the French occupation, reinstated the obligation in the form of one of the first laws with the following words:

Although as martial law required, these dispensations were only allowed in emergencies, because of the extensive and hardly observable limits they were often the cause of misrule. Hence, the orderly proclamation seems to be increasingly necessary now, partly because of the increasingly immorality, partly because of the many foreigners and partly, finally, because of the remaining abolition of local patrician privileges.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Luhmann 1986, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Luhmann 1986, 18–33.

<sup>40</sup> “Auch war diese Nachlassung zufolge der Ehegerichtssatzung [...] nur in Nothfällen [...] erlaubt, hat aber bey den ausgedehnten schwer zu beobachtenden Schranken öftere Unordnungen veranlasst.

Doubtlessly, in the Bernese context during the transition from the 18th to the 19th century intimacy was a privilege for people who could afford love. The performance of a wedding as a large and public ritual was a communal compulsion rather than the expression of an individualistic and therefore creative event. Performative weddings as the epitome of individualism are a very young historical development, the produce of a late-modern bourgeois culture of singularity.

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Dermal nun scheinen die ordentlichen Verkündigungen immer nöthiger zu werden, theils überhaupt wegen der Zunehmenden Sittenlosigkeit, theils auch wegen der vielen Fremden, und theils endlich wegen der übrigen Abschaffung hiesiger bürgerlichen Vorrechte", StABE A II 3047 1803–1830, 3.

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Benedikt Bauer

## Bridal Mysticism, Virtual Marriage, and Masculinity in the Moravian Hymnbook *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch*

### ABSTRACT

This article discusses the connections between virtual interaction, masculinity, and bridal mysticism in the Moravian hymnbook *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch* (1754). The motifs inherent in the hymnbook are examined in light of its anthropological presentations and perception of the divine, i.e. Jesus Christ, using mainly the ideas of virtual interaction (S. Knauss) and hegemonic masculinity (R. Connell).

### KEYWORDS

*Kleines Brüdergesangbuch*, Moravian hymnbook, masculinity, bridal mysticism

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Benedikt Bauer is research associate at the Chair of Reformation History and Recent Church History at the Ruhr-University of Bochum. His research focuses on gender constructions and especially constructions of masculinities, Critical Men's Studies in Religion, mysticism and history of piety.

Nowadays the Moravian church is commonly and primarily known for its daily watchwords, which continue to be used by a multitude of Christians around the globe. That this concept of an accompanying daily text originated in 1728 is less well known. Likewise, the origins, emergence, and evolution of the Moravian church in 18th century Germany and its specific religiosity as guided by Count Zinzendorf are not common knowledge beyond academic discourse, despite the presence of Moravian songs in contemporary hymnbooks like the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, used by German-language congregations. Interestingly, several song texts still in use in the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* have been only slightly changed since their original inclusion in Moravian hymnbooks like the *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch*. They therefore still contain a version, now slightly diffused, of the mystical motifs found in hymnbooks of the 18th century and in particular of the poetically highly productive period of the 1740s and 1750s.

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In this article I focus on specific motifs of the mystical piety from the period of the Moravian community called the “*Sichtungszeit*” – the time of sifting, in reference to Luke 22:31 – which are directly connected to a theology of marriage.<sup>1</sup> While exploring these motifs from the Moravian hymnbook, which provides vital evidence for the piety of the community, I will discuss the implicit constructions of masculinity within the lyrical expressions of bridal mysticism by linking them to Stephanie Knauss’s ideas of virtual interaction.

## SETTING THE SCENE: MORAVIAN PIETY IN THE TIME OF SIFTING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HYMNBOOKS

The origins of the Moravian community lie within the emigration of the *Unitas fratrum* for religious reasons from Bohemia and Moravia to the estate of Count Zinzendorf on the Hutberg, in Upper Lusatia. The statutes of 1727 indicate that the founding of the Moravian community stemmed from the need for a place where the brothers could dedicate their lives entirely to God – i.e. where they could live as a theocratic community – but without separatist intentions or a wish to start a new denomination, significant in particular in light of the troubles that arose with Lutheran orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup> The Moravians can be assigned to the broader movement known as pietism, in particular as Zinzendorf – whose importance in molding the community cannot be underestimated – had been educated at the Pädagogium Regium in Halle. Although Zinzendorf himself was critical of Pietism, from which he attempted to dissociate both himself and the Moravians, German church historians can correctly speak of *Herrnhuter Pietismus* (Moravian pietism) as a category in its own right. Interestingly, Zinzendorf developed an ecumenical line of thought which admitted every religion its own truth – although Moravian missionary activities clearly show that ultimate truth seemed to be found in the Christian message of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ through his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Hymnbooks played a prominent part within the community of the Moravians. In establishing the *Singstunden* – a time dedicated to singing – Zinzendorf and the Moravians inserted singing as an essential *praxis pietatis* into their communal piety. Singing could act like a sermon and serve as a pedagogical tool.<sup>3</sup> Its function was to produce the indispensable connection between the transcendent and the immanent. According to musicologist Anja Wehrend, who has studied the conception of music and harmony in the Moravian community in the baroque context, singing was considered evidence of the *analogia entis*, the analogy between God and creation:

<sup>1</sup> For the conception of marriage see for example Seibert 2003, 103–104; Beyreuther/Meyer 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See Hahn/Reichel 1977, 70–80.

<sup>3</sup> See Rössler 2000, 181; Meyer 1979, 102.

Zinzendorf feels therefore a deep chasm between the polarities of earth – heaven on the one hand. But on the other hand he believes that it is vital to encourage the community to overcome this chasm. The theological premise for this line of thought is formed by the redemptive act of Christ, on which the restoration of harmony between humans and God is initially based.<sup>4</sup>

In the time of sifting, dated here to the years 1738 to 1753,<sup>5</sup> during which the *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch* was developed and published, Moravian piety was undergoing a significant change. The *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch* consists of two parts. The first part, entitled “Shepherd songs from Bethlehem. For use by all who are poor, small and lowly”, was first published in 1742 by C. Saur in Germantown in the United States and comprised 360 songs on 128 pages, with an additional nine pages containing a register of melodies.<sup>6</sup> As this version was out of stock after only one year, in 1751 the Moravians began work on a new edition.<sup>7</sup> In the edition from 1754, published by Johann Jacob Würz, the first part, consisting of 368 songs on 122 pages, is joined by a second part, with the title “The song of the dance at Sharon, as the hymnbook of the small brothers, part two”. The songs contained in the hymnbook were not written and composed solely by Count Zinzendorf for they were reviewed by the community, making the composition of the hymnbook a communal project.<sup>8</sup>

Judgement on that period, from 1738 to 1753, oscillates between vehement condemnation and approval of the literary-poetic and communal achievements. The historian Paul Peucker has drawn our attention to the emergence between 1745 and 1748 of the concept of the *Creutzluftvögelein* (little bird in the air of the cross) and the adoration of the piercing in Christ’s side, which became increasingly eroticized.<sup>9</sup> Both images followed the idea that the human soul could find shelter in the wounds of Jesus Christ – especially the wound in his side – with the bird reference alluding to motifs like the dove in the cleft of the rock in Song of Songs 2:14. These two topics were closely linked to, or rather form a distinctive element of, the worship of the stigmata and the bridal mysticism of the Moravian community. Absent Moravian diaries, the lyrical expression of this piety within the hymnbooks brings us closest to the actual piety of that age. The principle of the *Singstunden*, which took the form of spontaneous singing of a mix of various verses, is mirrored in the structure of hymnbooks such as the *Kleines*

4 Wehrend 2009, 99. In the partial absence of English versions of the literature referred to, all direct translations from German are mine.

5 For the discussion of the dating of the Sichtungszeit see Peucker 2002, 77.

6 Hirten-Lieder von Bethlehem, Zum Gebrauch für alles was arm ist, was klein und gering ist; see Meyer 1987, 206.

7 See Görnandt, 1926, 41; Meyer 1979, 59.

8 See Meyer 1979, 59.

9 See Peucker 2002, 78.



*Brüdergesangbuch*: there is no stringent numbering of the individual songs, no clear structure or rubrication.<sup>10</sup> When this evidence is combined with Zinzendorf's remark that fundamentally there was no need for a hymnbook as songs that originated in the heart were preferable, we can recognize that the songs of the *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch* were an expression of a vivid piety solidified into guidance for the community and by incorporation of its themes they result into exactly the same vivid piety. The songs were generated by the community out of its piety, reflected that piety and also, through their use, reproduced that piety.

## VIRTUAL MARRIAGE? REFLECTING ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY WITHIN MYSTICAL TEXTS

Interaction [is] per se a corporeal issue – even within the virtual interaction in chatrooms, the bodies of the users sitting in front of the screen and receiving information are involved, even though they don't meet directly – and in a large part my identity is formed by the imitation of others, by my access to them, by my being perceived by them.<sup>11</sup>

At first sight, talking about virtual interaction and “virtual marriage” in an 18th century context seems odd, even misplaced. But if we think this conception through and broaden our definition of virtuality, applying Stephanie Knauss's explanations to bridal mysticism can be productive.

Bridal mysticism in the Christian tradition is to be defined as personal spirituality inspired by the Song of Songs and finding its affective expressions in symbolic sexual love and an ardent desire for the divine loved one, Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> The mysticism of Zinzendorf and the Moravians has direct connotations in the Passion, with the adoration of the piercing in Christ's side, and inherits Passion mystical motifs<sup>13</sup> but is basically constituted from classical elements of mysticism, for example paradoxical use of language.<sup>14</sup> Mysticism can be defined as one of the most intensive phenomena of piety:

The core element of this phenomenon is the religious “Spitzenerfahrung” [peak experience] of the *unio mystica* that results in “radical interior transformation (transformatio mystica) and deepened perception and cognition”. With Annette Wilke the definition of the *unio* as “concentration of transcendence into the personal” (Luhmann/Fuchs) shall be preferred.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Meyer 1979, 59–60.

<sup>11</sup> Knauss 2008, 61.

<sup>12</sup> See Wilke 2006a, 81.

<sup>13</sup> For passion mysticism see Wilke 2006b, 396.

<sup>14</sup> The bridal mysticism of Zinzendorf and the Moravians was an adaptation of medieval bridal mysticism, especially as inspired by Bernard of Clairvaux and also William of St. Thierry and St. John of the Cross (see Peucker 2011, 43, 50), transformed for a Protestant context.

<sup>15</sup> Bauer 2017, 179.

This transformational process inevitably affects the construction of the collective and subjective identities, as well as the construction of masculinity, if gender, and therefore masculinity, is understood as an essential identity marker. This identity is formed in the mystical process of virtual interaction within the lyrical texts of the hymnbooks. The motifs are used to evoke the mystical encounter with the significant other, Jesus Christ; they are a communal and poetic expression of a personal interaction between the “you” of Jesus Christ and the “me” of the individual soul of the singing congregation. This expression is both highly individual in its encounter with the divine in the *unio mystica* and highly formalized in the ritual and – in its printed form in the hymnbook – lyrical standardization of the possibility for the individual divine encounter. The idea of a “virtual interaction” therefore seems applicable to the piety of the Moravians and its bridal mysticism insofar as the interaction with Jesus Christ is primarily virtual, i.e. textual and lyrical. Additionally, it appears to me that within the bridal version of the *unio mystica* lies an opportunity to expand this conception to a kind of “virtual marriage” because on both planes of virtuality – the textual and the transcendental – an interaction occurs between bride and bridegroom, i.e. between the individual and Jesus. From the textual evocation of the bridal interaction in the *unio mystica* to the actual encounter in the mystical peak experience, the soul is determined as the significant other to the courting Jesus Christ and becomes female – in spite of the actual sex of the human it belongs to – by its positioning as bride of the divine bridegroom.<sup>16</sup> The construction of the individual’s gender within the Moravian community was affected by the virtual interaction and “virtual marriage” and by the bridal *transformatio mystica*. Whereas the gender construction of female Moravians within the frame of bridal mysticism is congruent with their immanent female gender roles within the community and society, a discrepancy occurs between heteronormative requirements of being a “man”<sup>17</sup> – the hegemonic masculinity within the surrounding society, the “white heterosexual males”<sup>18</sup> – and the masculinity induced by bridal mysticism, i.e. the hegemonic masculinity inside the Moravian community.<sup>19</sup>

### SINGING TO THE BRIDEGROOM – BRIDAL MYSTICISM, VIRTUAL MARRIAGE, AND MASCULINITY IN THE KLEINES BRÜDERGESANGBUCH

To characterize the motifs of bridal mysticism and to apply to these motifs the preceding thoughts on virtuality and masculinity, I will now analyze in three

16 On the female soul see e.g. Peucker 2011, 46.

17 On heteronormativity see Degele 2008, 89.

18 Di Blasi 2013, 17.

19 For hegemonic masculinity see Connell 2000, 98.



steps exemplary passages from the *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch*, focusing on (1) the characterization of Jesus Christ, (2) anthropological statements, and (3) the connection between the conceptual pair bride/bridegroom, the semantics around the worship of the stigmata, and the recurring use of the term “dress”.

## JESUS CHRIST THE BRIDEGROOM

Following the inherent logic of Christocentrism, a manifold articulation of the name of Jesus Christ is to be expected. The hymnbook *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch* is no exception: epithets with the name Jesus Christ enjoy such great popularity that we can only note a brief sample here. The naming of Jesus Christ as “bridegroom” is of particular importance for bridal mysticism. Although the specific term “bridegroom” is not so common, comparison of passages from the hymnbook makes evident that the status of Jesus as bridegroom is omnipresent as a subtext. We see in the following two passages, for example, that the term “man” – in German the term for man, “Mann”, is often a synonym for the term for husband, “(Ehe)Mann” – runs in parallel with the term “bridegroom”:

Have You already loved me, as I was highly grieved? Didn't You send your courting, bridegroom! to me?<sup>20</sup>

Which one amongst all ... that long for their beloved, which one equals my man? ... Which one will immolate his life willingly for the life of his bride? Where will such a couple be married?<sup>21</sup>

The German word for husband, *Ehemann*, which is semantically equivalent to “bridegroom”, is used only once in the first part of the *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch* but is directly connected to the term “savior” (*Heiland*), with the implication that the primary function of Jesus Christ in his status as bridegroom is redemptive:

My Savior! If I a poor child that winds itself around your feet and can't do even an hour without You, You soul husband [*Seelen=Bräutigam*], and that loves you above all and more than itself were more experienced in that language.<sup>22</sup>

20 All quotations from the *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch* are translated from the German version of the text in Beyreuther 1978 by me and are quoted according to the names of the hymnbook's syllabus. Due to the fact that a continuous pagination is missing in the edition I will use the page numbers of each chapter of the hymnbook's syllabus in addition to the regular citation. Because of the loss of literary quality in the translation, the original version of the lyrics is provided in the footnotes. “Hast Du mich doch schon geliebt, da ich Doch gleich hoch betrübt? hast Du deine werbung nicht, Bräutigam! auf mich gericht?” Beyreuther 1978, Hirten-Lieder, 84.

21 “Welcher unter allen denen... die sich nach geliebten sehnen, welcher gleicht meinem Mann? ... Welcher wird sein eigen leben für das leben seiner braut williglich zum opfer geben? wo wird solch ein paar getraut?” Beyreuther 1978, Hirten-Lieder, 108.

22 “Mein Heiland! wär ich armes kind, das sich um deine füsse windt, und Dich, du Seelen=Ehemann, nicht eine stunde missen kan, und das Dich über sich und alles liebt, in dieser sprache etwas mehr ge-übt”, Beyreuther 1978, 41.



Three aspects of this passage are to be highlighted: (1) the subjectively felt inadequacy of the own use of language for the described objective – a typical mystical topos, (2) the urgent need to express and even more urgent need to have intimacy with Jesus, and, finally (3) the connection between redemption and the stigmata (“that winds itself around your feet”). The feet thereby stand as *pars pro toto* for all stigmata (feet, hands, side), which themselves are likewise *pars pro toto* for Jesus Christ – and as we will see, for even more. The primary function as redeemer is expressed mainly in formulations that worship the stigmata, so that Jesus is addressed through his wounds, scores, welts, blood, sweat, tears, and, preferably, the hole in his side, but not without perpetual evocation with terms of love and devotion to the decidedly masculine bridegroom.<sup>23</sup> He is the lamb and man of torture (*Marter=Mann*<sup>24</sup>) as well as the loving shepherd of his congregation. Through his being simultaneously immanent and transcendent, loving and grieving, God and man, he is the ultimate mediator between the polarities of heaven and earth. Both the transcendence and the immanence of Jesus emphasize his masculinity:<sup>25</sup> as transcendent savior, he is the loving and redeeming bridegroom; as immanent human being, he bears the suffering at the cross in manly fashion: “The figure of God [*Gottes=Gestalt*] came in the figure of man [*Mannsgestalt*], relinquished all his Godly might, was like one of us in every detail, carried our misery on his back.”<sup>26</sup> Yet he is depicted as “poor, unsightly, and much despised” in his human form,<sup>27</sup> as a result of the inherent dualism of transcendence/immanence: even the immanence of Jesus is connoted with decay, evanescence, and sin, all of which are characteristic of the praying and singing human and will be changed ultimately by Jesus Christ as the loving and redeeming savior.

## THE HUMAN AND THE BRIDAL SOUL

Mankind is corrupted and captured in sin – this is not just a pan-Christian position on the result of the Fall, an insight of the Reformation in the *simul iustus et peccator*, but also the baseline of the Moravian anthropology. Individuals and

23 He is also addressed as hero, king, prince, ruler, and master; mostly masculine expressions, even if the idea of the birth of the church out of the hole in his side – “the core of Zinzendorf’s theology of the sidehole” (Peucker 2002, 56) – allows him occasionally be depicted as mother and mother-heart: see Beyreuther 1978, *Vom Wandel im Licht*, 24; Beyreuther 1978, *Von der Ablegung unsrer Hütte*, 3. Vogt speaks of a performative femininity, which seems fitting, see Vogt 2015, 80.

24 Beyreuther 1978, Anhang, 20.

25 Vogt confirms the emphasis on the masculinity of Jesus Christ, see Vogt 2015, 69, 77. Even if Atwood’s thoughts on Christ as an androgynous figure are striking (see Atwood 2011, 12), the masculinity of Jesus Christ as found in the *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch* as well the necessity for masculinity in a binary gendered bridal mysticism seem much more plausible to me. Atwood himself points out that “Christ is the only true male” in the context of bridal mysticism; see Atwood 2011, 25.

26 “Die *Gottes=gestalt* kam in *Mannsgestalt*, äussert’ sich aller der *Gottes=gewalt*, ward wie unsers gleichen, in allen stücken, trug unser elend auf seinem rücken”, Beyreuther 1978, *Hirten-Lieder*, 7.

27 Beyreuther 1978, *Hirten-Lieder*, 7.

therefore the community as well are fundamentally depicted as sinners – the most common naming for the individual's soul in the *Kleines Brüdergesangbuch*. The insight into the corruption of the immanent sphere by sin and the realization that God's tender loving care in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of his son Jesus Christ is the only solution to this desolate state of existence relegate the individual to Jesus. This realization has a processual character that once initiated irrevocably binds to Christ: "Who once recognizes the wound in his side as the cause of his beatitude; who once lays eyes on the stigmata [Nägel=maale] at the hands and feet: he will have to say, my Lord, my God!"<sup>28</sup>

This first encounter with the divine leads ultimately to complete devotion to Jesus Christ, even to the extent of self-abandonment: "Body and strength I will retain, if it may serve Christ, body and life I will abandon for the true husband of souls [Seelen=Mann]."<sup>29</sup>

The self-presentation of the singing individual can be described as semantic self-humiliation: the individual is small, a worm, poor, (like) dust, "a bad maggot, a rotten wood, worth nothing but to burn".<sup>30</sup> But, in fact, this self-humiliation does not seem to be a product of any outward pressure but rather a desired status, an inner longing, that allows intimacy with Jesus Christ – the self-humiliation of the individual takes places only in contrast to Christ's glory and redemptive act and thus the individual can constitute himself or herself – and therefore be assured of salvation:

You lacerated wounds! how sweet are thou to me, in thou I have found a little spot [plätzgen, diminutive of place] for me: how gladly am I only dust, if nevertheless I am the spoils of the lamb! ... My heart seethes out of love to you, my dearest lamb, and all my urges are to live [for] the bridegroom, the one who conciliated me and was given to the cross out of love.<sup>31</sup>

The wounds are the desired place to be, everything inside the singer prompts the singer to be in intimate and "daily interaction with the savior".<sup>32</sup> But the individual isn't depicted just by self-humiliation. Through the *transformatio mystica* that cumulates in the motif of the wounds, the individual is released from

28 "Wer einmal die Wunde in seiner Seit kennt, als die ursach der seligkeit; wer die Nä-gel=maale, an Händ und Füßen, einmal erblickt: der wird sagen müssen, Mein HErr, mein GOtt!", Beyreuther 1978, 7–8.

29 "Leib und kraft will ich bewahren, wenn es Christo dienen kan, leib und leben lass ich fahren für den treuen Seelen=mann", Beyreuther 1978, Hirten-Lieder, 92.

30 "[E]ine schlechte mad', ein faules holz, nichts werth, als zu verbrennen", Beyreuther 1978, Vom Wandel im Licht, 23.

31 "Ihr aufgerissnen Wunden! wie lieblich seydt ihr mir, ich hab in euch gefunden ein plätzgen für und für: wie gerne bin ich nur ein staub, wenn ich nichts desto wenger auch bin des Lammes raub! ... Mein herze wallt vor liebe nach dir, mein liebstes Lamm, und alle meine triebe sind, um dem Bräutigam zu leben, Dem, der mich versöhnt und ward für mich aus liebe ans creutz hinan gedehnt", Beyreuther 1978, Hirten-Lieder, 89.

32 See Beyreuther 1978, Gebetlein, 12; Vom Wandel im Licht, 6.24; Hirten-Lieder, 32; Anhang, 8.10. For Meyer this is the leitmotiv of mysticism; see Meyer 1983, 93.



his or her old existence – classically this is called the mystical death, which means the dying of willfulness and total surrender to the divine that can be traced in Moravian songs as well<sup>33</sup> – and introduced into the status of divine bride. The depiction of the soul as bride evokes much more positive allusions, the choice of language becomes creative and playful. The soul becomes – these semantics were used in the time of sifting – a little dove (diminutive *Täublein*) and a little bee (diminutive *Bienlein*<sup>34</sup>) but most prominently the idea of the *Creutzluftvöglein*<sup>35</sup> and *creutz=luft=täubelein* (little dove in the air of the cross) emerges:

What does a *creutz=luft=täubelein* do if it wants to get out of its little hut? the limbs are a little sick: sooner or later the soul wants to see the bridegroom; thus she soon sees him stand there, she sees the side, hand, and foot, the little lamb plants a kiss on the faint heart. The kiss of peace pulls out the soul and takes it home in his mouth: the kiss is seen right in the hut... and if it's finished, the soul gets it to join it in the cave of the wound.<sup>36</sup>

Thus playful motifs show the cordiality of the interaction between Christ and the soul, which will be exemplified through the correlation of the motifs of bride/bridegroom, stigma, and dress and their religious and gender implications.

## BRIDE/BRIDEGROOM, STIGMA, DRESS – THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE BRIDE

The stigmata are central to worship in the Moravian community, in which after recognizing his or her own sinfulness the individual searches for his or her divine bridegroom and the path to righteousness within the virtual marriage. The singing congregation wants to be washed in the blood of Christ and “anointed with your wound”,<sup>37</sup> so that “the body as it was can go to heaven, still undecayed, completely [mit haut und haar, with skin and hair] into the beautiful wounds [wunden=schön, a wordplay]”.<sup>38</sup> The essential impulse of worship focused on the stigmata is justification: the sinful individual “finds forgiveness for all sins in the wounds”<sup>39</sup> and

33 Beyreuther 1978, Von der Fröhlichkeit in der Hoffnung, 8.

34 See Beyreuther 1978, Von der Ablegung unsrer Hütte, 13.

35 For this motif and its temporal emergence in 1745/46 see Peucker 2002, 78.

36 “Wie machts ein creutz=luft=täubelein, wenns 'raus will aus dem hüttelein? die glieder sind ein wenig krank: der seele wirds kurz oder lang, den Bräutigam zu sehn; so sieht sie ihn bald stehn, sie sieht die Seite, Hand und Fuss, das Lämmlein gibt ihr einen kuss, aufs matte herze. Der frieds=kuss zieht die seele 'raus, und in dem munde mit nach hause: der hütte sieht man den kuss an... wenns gar ist, hohlt die seele sie nach zur Wun-den=höhle!”, Beyreuther 1978, Von der Ablegung unsrer Hütte, 8.

37 “[D]er Leib, so wie er war, kan in den himmel gehen, noch unverwest, mit haut und haar, und in der Wunden=schön”, Beyreuther 1978, Von der Ablegung unsrer Hütte, 9.

38 Beyreuther 1978, Anhang, 22.

39 Beyreuther 1978, Worte unsers Zeugnisses, 5.



gains “blood-righteousness”<sup>40</sup> “because the blood of Christ steadily cries mercy, mercy”.<sup>41</sup> This justification is granted out of the divine bridegroom’s love for his bride-to-be, described quietly and graphically in the following verses:

Therefore, Lord Christ! my refuge is the cave of your wounds: when sin and death straitened me, I turned to them. ... Therein I stay, whether body and soul are divided here: so I will be there with You, my shelter, in eternal joys, ... You wanted to dress me up into yourself, clothe me in your innocence! That I, sanctified from sins, may last before God. ... When will I get my dress that’s ready for me, my Lord and my God! My dress so white besprinkled with red. ... Do you keep it for my eternal adornment? I need it right now, without the dress you don’t come into the blessed kingdom. ... Now it is done, I get dressed: this is wanted by he who is called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.<sup>42</sup>

This passage again shows the forgiveness of sins within the wounds, and also in the use of the term “dress”. The motif of the wounds is extended through combination with the bridal status, for not only are the wounds imagined for contemplation but the bride is actually dressed into the wounds – with the apocalyptic white wedding dress washed in the blood of Christ: “Because I am now dressed with You, Lord Jesus Christ, so also the wedding dress is ready and prepared for me.”<sup>43</sup> At this point the bridal mysticism imagines the breaking of all barriers, even the corporeal determination of the self and the bodily and tactile barrier of the skin, by virtual interaction and virtual marriage. The individual perpetually imagines the virtual piercing through the corporeal barrier of Jesus Christ, to fulfill the wish for boundless intimacy. Therefore, the soul gets dressed up in its wedding dress, which is actually Jesus Christ himself, who breaks the imagined tactile barrier against the sinners by enclosing them with himself and permeates every strata of human immanence to unify with the bridal soul. The *unio mystica* evokes an internal transformation of soul and self and therefore transcends biological sex and transforms gender by converting brothers and sisters of the Moravian community alike into brides.

The male participants in the Moravian community are constituted by their female soul even up to the point where Christian Renatus, the son of Zinzen-

40 Beyreuther 1978, Anhang, 6.

41 “[W]eil Christi Blut beständig schreyt, Barmherzigkeit, barmherzigkeit!”, Beyreuther 1978, Hirten-Lieder, 107.

42 “Also, HErr Christ! mein zuflucht ist die höhle deiner Wunden : wenn sünd und tod mich bracht in noth, hab ich mich drein gefunden. ... Darinn ich bleib, ob hier der leib und seel von einander scheiden: so werd ich dort bey Dir, mein hort, seyn in ewigen freuden, ... In dich wolst Du mich kleiden ein, dein unschuld ziehen an! dass ich, von allen sünden rein, vor GOtt bestehen kan. ... Wenn krig ich mein kleid, das mir ist bereit, mein HErr und mein GOtt! das kleid, das so weiss ist, besprenget mit roth. ... Verwahrst du es mir zur ewigen zier? ich brauch es izt gleich, man kömt ohne kleid nicht ins selige reich. ... Nun ist es gethan, ich ziehe mich an: das walt der es heisst, der Vater der Sohn und der Heilige Geist”, Beyreuther 1978, Hirten-Lieder, 36–37.

43 “Weil Du nun, HErr JEsu Christ! mir selbst angezogen bist, so ist auch das hochzeitkleid für mich fertig und bereit”, Beyreuther 1978, 85.

dorf, exclaimed at the Mannesfest in Herrnhaag that all brothers would now be sisters because all souls are female, therefore men would only temporarily be male.<sup>44</sup> The body-reflexive<sup>45</sup> reproductions of the lyrical expressions of bridal mysticism – singing is an outermost bodily activity<sup>46</sup> – combined with the exclamation by Christian Renatus identify and incorporate the depicted masculinity.

Hence, the hegemonic masculinity within the Moravian community can be defined twice, which is in line with Connell's plurality of masculinities.<sup>47</sup> The primary hegemonic masculinity is virtual and transcendental – it is the masculinity of Jesus Christ as savior and bridegroom, “ultimately, Christ is the only true male”.<sup>48</sup> He becomes the indicator and center for all constructions of gender within the Moravian community, for which reason, Peter Vogt suggests, we should talk of a “gendered theology”.<sup>49</sup> The construction of the actual hegemonic masculinity – not virtual and transcendent like the masculinity of Christ, but human and immanent – is in direct relation to the transcendental masculinity. It becomes somewhat passive and effeminate by being the bride of the transcendent masculinity<sup>50</sup> but is still hegemonic in relation to femininity within the community. It is also marginalized – there were recurring accusations of homosexuality by “white heterosexual males” outside the community<sup>51</sup> – by society's hegemonic masculinity. The hegemonic masculinity of the Moravians presented within the lyrical expressions of bridal mysticism is thus an ambivalent and multi-relational masculinity that is and is not hegemonic as well as being marginalized and effeminate.

## CONCLUSION

In this article I have discussed connections between lyrical expressions of piety, i.e. bridal mysticism, heteronormative constructions like the rite of passage that is marriage, virtuality, body, and masculinity. Even if heteronormative structures

44 See Peucker 2002, 71.

45 See Connell 2000, 79–85.

46 For the connection between religion, music, and body see Laack 2015.

47 See Connell 2000, 98–102.

48 Atwood 1997, 31.

49 Vogt 2015, 66.

50 Peucker explains: “By remaining passive the individual was playing the role appropriate for a bride”, Peucker 2006, 58.

51 On heteronormative reactions and attempted regulation by white heterosexual males, see Peucker's remarks on Volck, Peucker 2002, 51. Aaron Spencer Fogleman still insists on a “metaphorical, spiritual homosexuality”, Foglemann 2003, 309. Faull suggests the connection between male Moravians and Jesus Christ be described as a “mode of performative bi-sexuality” (Faull 2011, 56) and sees masculinity – apparently the Moravians' as well as Christ's – as “vulnerable masculinity” (55–56.74.). Even if this line of thought seems compelling – especially because all human existence might be described as somehow vulnerable – a binary conception of gender, on which all fluidity in the constructions of gender in the Moravian community seems to be based, can hardly contain two vulnerable masculinities functioning as bride and bridegroom.



were the foundation of thinking about marriage in the 18th century and even if the Moravian community cohered around these structures and reproduced them, heteronormativity did not necessarily exclude alternative constructions of masculinity. As we have seen in light of the bodily cognition of the self in the virtual interaction, lyrical text, and therefore also other medial representations, can be accessed such that perceptions of the correlation of sex and gender are reconstructed – in this case especially masculinity. A specific form of piety like bridal mysticism can allow for heteronormative structures of marriage to be partially fractured without the heteronormative structures themselves being broken down; rather, perceptions of sex and gender are changed and heteronormativity bent in a way that makes it possible to think of the male individual and the whole male congregation as bride and, consequently, as female to some extent. In conclusion, the Moravian community in the time of sifting could be characterized as constituted by marriage, both real and virtual, that was oriented completely toward Jesus Christ as a bridegroom and his wounds and was determined by a multiplicity of masculinities as well as the transgressional ambiguity and fluidity of gender.<sup>52</sup> In this material we have found virtual and/or transcendental masculinity functioning as an indicator of immanent masculinities, an idea that is surely worth exploring in other sources, and not necessarily in western Christian material alone.

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**Open Section**





Vuk Uskoković

## Revisiting the Relevance of Conceptualism of Godard's Film

### ABSTRACT

Jean-Luc Godard's filmmaking is analyzed as a conceptual art, as in agreement with his most accomplished role as a film critic, not a classical filmmaker. In his 1970 manifesto, Godard argues that (1) we must make political films, and (2) we must make films politically. While the first point provokes a constructive critique of the art of cinema, the second point leads to the provision of an absolute cinematic experience. Correspondingly, it is argued that albeit rare and systematically unsupported in the academic setting, the most prolific scientific work is such that it implicitly questions the dominant presentation styles and methodological paradigms in parallel with providing meaningful basic and/or practical findings. Multiple other scientifically relevant elements of Godard's conceptual approach to revolutionizing the art of cinema are elaborated too. Particularly highlighted is the importance of *ad hoc* improvisation, deliberate imperfectness, the aesthetics of poverty, the embracement of all-encompassing uncertainties, and the eagerness to constantly get lost to be found. "I don't make movies; I make cinema" is Godard's precept, whose translation to any professional field, including scientific research and teaching, could produce uncountable benefits. Correlating well with the Buberian ontology, Godard's art is intimately tied to the iteration of the point that the value of an act is measured by the extent to which it reaches out away from the subject and into the world. Corresponding annihilations of the protagonists symbolize the necessity of the artist's working against the self in the attempt to use his art to destroy the art in question and point at everything as an equally precious art. At the religious plane, this longing for the incessant negation of the self and the attraction to epistemic and existential poverty are perceived as a route to the birth of a diviner self. The discourse follows an impulsive and unstructured course so as to veritably reflect Godard's approach to filmmaking.

### KEYWORDS

ADIEU AU LANGAGE (FR 2014), anarchism, conceptual art, HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA (FR/CH 1988–2000), Jean-Luc Godard, natural science, La Nouvelle Vague

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Vuk Uskoković was appointed assistant professor of bioengineering at the University of Illinois in Chicago in 2013 and of biomedical and pharmaceutical sciences at Chapman University in Orange County, California, in 2016. He is the founder and the

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director of the Advanced Materials and Nanobiotechnology Laboratory, the world's first conceptual science lab, where research distances itself from R&D entrepreneurialism and shares the approach common to conceptual arts. Albeit rooted in natural sciences, the work of Dr. Uskoković and his lab draws inspiration for research from humanities and arts, including music and, particularly, film.

## LESSON ON DELIBERATE IMPERFECTIONS, RELIANCE ON INTUITION, AND GETTING LOST AS A PREREQUISITE FOR BEING FOUND

The making of a Godard movie has always been a matter of relying on intuition, *ad hoc* improvisation, creation with an eye for the moment, never ever acting the same thing twice. This will be our first premise in the discourse that follows. Our second premise is that an attempt to reflect on an object without reflecting its nature on every single level of the structure of this reflection is a vain attempt, an act of hypocrisy, as it were. For example, to analytically dissect poetry using a prosaic language of not poets but dry philosophers presents an unfaithful way of reflecting on it. In this case, to talk about Godard without riding on the same go-with-the-flow momentum would be a dishonest act and, must I say, blasphemy with respect to the implicit message that his filmmaking intended to convey.

Henceforth, this essay will be written without much looking back and restructuring; rather, a surf on the waves of intuition, verbally chaotic and disheveled, bestowed breathlessly, will be used, evoking the style in which Blaise Pascal, that undercover hero of *La Nouvelle Vague* martyrs, wrote his *Pensées*: “I will write down my thoughts here as they come and in a perhaps not aimless confusion. This is the true order and it will always show my aim by its very disorder. I should be honoring my subject too much if I treated it in order, since I am trying to show that it is incapable of it”.<sup>1</sup> Hence, we will substitute strict script following with *ad hoc* improvisation, preplanning with an eye for the moment, and setting things in stone with sketching them in the air, never knowing what will come next and, thus, potentially finding the destination in every point of the path on this plane of reality that resembles Pascal's sphere whose circumference is nowhere and center everywhere.

To preplan and overthink everything in advance is a sin in Godard's filmmaking universe and if we wish to faithfully map a quest for the semantic essence of this universe, we have no choice but to obey. Now, does this mean that we should approach our creative acts the way Isaiah Berlin approached lecturing,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pascal 1966 [1662], 216.

<sup>2</sup> Berlin 2002.



Fig. 1: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA:  
UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE (Jean-Luc  
Godard, FR/CH 1998) –  
"It's about time that the thought  
becomes once again what it  
really is: dangerous for the  
thinker."<sup>3</sup>



that is, by coming up with a dozen-page draft a week before the talk, though only to shorten it gradually, ending up with one page only on the morning of the lecture, a single paragraph an hour before it, a single sentence while waiting behind the curtain to be called and then tossing even that single sentence into the garbage can when stepping out onto the podium? The answer is, undoubtedly, Yes, but sometimes. For, sometimes the right structure of the whole can make up for a rather trivial content and make it timelessly beautiful. Think, for example, of Powell and Pressburger's *A CANTERBURY TALE* (GB 1944), whose unique structure is the key to its quality: quiet and sweetly mysterious for the majority of the movie and then exploding into a fantastic finale in its last moments, reflecting life more veritably than the classical twist-climax-resolution form. Henceforth, the conception of an overarching structure wherein beginnings and ends would reconnect and fit into each other like a hand into a glove is desirable, so long as each moment, each brick in it is infused with the spirit of the moment and given a dose of imperfection that would make it appear always fresh and new, like a well-improvised jazz tune. For, an utterly perfect structure is also an utterly lifeless structure, resembling a peak from which one could only tumble down, when only structures that contain cracks of imperfections can transmit light through them, bedazzle the viewer and act as a stairway to the stars, leading to the top exactly because of never aspiring to be on the top. "Don't show every aspect of things; allow yourself the margin of indefiniteness" was Godard's explicit precept,<sup>4</sup> reflecting his belief in the liberation from the shackles of ostensible perfectness and the unleashing of infinitely potent creative powers through the renouncement of the strivings to reach absolute exactness in expression.

At this point, already, Godard, that relentless breaker of conventions, flirt with the paradox and master in directing digression and a loss of focus from the

<sup>3</sup> HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LE CONTRÔLE DE L'UNIVERS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:07:00.

<sup>4</sup> HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: TOUTES LES HISTOIRES (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1988), 00:00:48.

central thread of the storyline, must be proud. For I have begun this discourse about Godard, yet already in the first paragraph I wandered off the topic and got so far from the intended subject that we could wonder how I might get back now to this central thread of discourse without making the reader suspicious about my ability to run its course. Again, not that Godard would object; in the only movie, albeit short, which he codirected with François Truffaut, *UNE HISTOIRE D'EAU* (FR 1968), a couple gets lost and stranded on a flooded land on their way to Paris and a woman, the protagonist – lest the screenwriter, as it were, be a hypocrite for not reflecting the sense of being lost, the major point of the movie, at each and every of its levels – tells a story about Louis Aragon lecturing at the Sorbonne on Petrarch by starting off with a 45-minute-long eulogy about Matisse, then being interrupted by a student who demanded he move to the subject and finishing the sentence cut short by the student with the claim that the originality of Petrarch “lay precisely in the art of digression”<sup>5</sup>. This, however, brings us over to two other major points of Godard’s philosophy that he conveyed through his filmmaking. First, in agreement with Warren McCulloch’s view of life as a construct made of “unreliable components that achieve reliable outcomes”,<sup>6</sup> the life Godard praised is the life of Outlands, life lived in complete contrast to that of machinelike *Alphaville*, wherein everything proceeds according to preplanned programs and nothing is ever lost. If “behaving illogically”<sup>7</sup> – such as by considering faith and love as meaningful for human existence<sup>8</sup> or expressing grief or joy through crying<sup>9</sup> – was a crime calling for capital punishment in the dystopian city of *Alphaville*, then the necessity to fall apart every now and then, into pieces, semantically and existentially, was an anarchic standpoint naturally praised and promoted by Godard. Secondly, the greatness of an act in Godard’s microcosm is determined by how far it reaches away from itself. “The greatness of a piece of art equals the distance between the two concepts that it brings together”, as Godard himself says in *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE*.<sup>10</sup> “Bring things together that don’t seem ready to be”, he says on another occasion.<sup>11</sup> The farthest beginnings and ends, theses and antitheses are thus called to be merged in our expressions, yielding little or big Hegelian syntheses and bursts of light emerging from them. “Philosophy is a being, the heart of it being the question of its being insofar as this being posits a being other than itself” is what Godard says in *ADIEU AU LANGAGE*

5 *UNE HISTOIRE D'EAU* (Jean-Luc Godard / François Truffaut, FR 1968), 00:04:10.

6 Beer 1999.

7 *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:42:20.

8 *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:43:20.

9 *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:42:30; 00:46:30.

10 *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:21:10.

11 *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LES SIGNES PARMI NOUS* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:27:20.





Fig. 2: *PIERROT LE FOU* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965): Pierrot and Marianne impersonate Uncle Sam's nephew and Uncle Ho's niece, as they make fun of American tourists. Godard has never hidden his anti-American sentiments and has repeatedly assaulted the fabric of the American culture, from its cutthroat capitalism to shallow, mediocrity-fostering commercialism to prostituted professionalism and beyond. As an illustration, his 1967 manifesto insinuates the intention to demolish "the vast Hollywood-Cinecitta-Mosfilm-Pinewood etc. empire" and "create cinemas which are national, free, brotherly, comradely and bonded in friendship."<sup>12</sup> Hinting at the manipulative machinery of Hollywood, Godard turned cinema halls into mass execution sites for those who refused to conform to the dehumanized lifestyle of Alphaville.<sup>13</sup> Hollywood cinemas, per Godard's metaphor, thus become halls where the spiritual is subtracted from the material and which brainwashed attendees leave deadened on the inside.

(Jean-Luc Godard, FR 2014).<sup>14</sup> The greatness of an act is thus measured by the extent to which it reaches out away from the subject and into the world, away from I and into the heart of that ethereal, Buberian Thou. It is for this reason

<sup>12</sup> Godard 1968, 243.

<sup>13</sup> *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:59:40.

<sup>14</sup> *ADIEU AU LANGAGE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 2014), 00:12:30.



that Godard kills the protagonists in countless of his movies, from *À BOUT DE SOUFFLE* (FR 1960) to *VIVRE SA VIE* (FR 1962) to *PIERROT LE FOU* (FR/IT 1965), that is, to demonstrate that the best lived life is life selflessly streaming toward the extinguishment of this very life and toward the unreserved merging with the world. Hence, “it was as if I were the world and the world were me”, says Juliette in *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D’ELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967).<sup>15</sup> To that end, Godard fragments the world, inner and outer, into the finest of pieces, producing a sense that something is missing, that something has been lost, being the cracks through which one falls and arrives at the penultimate freedom and connectedness of all things.

Annihilation of the artist symbolized by the death of his protagonist also serves the purpose of liberating him from the limitations of the given art and releasing him into the freeness of being, a state of mind in which literally everything becomes a piece of art worthy of astonishment and in which creation becomes guided by Godard’s norm, “Things are there, why manipulate them”.<sup>16</sup> This, in a way, is the logical extension of Dziga Vertov’s idea that the most authentic cinema grows not from a fictional construction of the filmed material, but from an impromptu immersion of the eye of the camera into the world, as spontaneous, unpredictably evolving and tuned to the spirit of the moment as it can be. In its extreme, terminal destination, this approach to artistic creation echoes the way of Friedrich Munro from Wenders’ *LISBON STORY* (DE/PO 1994) and his shooting movies by walking around the city with a camera tied to his back, sticking on to Nabokov’s finding patches of butterfly’s wings more artistically pleasing than “dark pictures, thrones, the stones that pilgrims kiss, poems that take a thousand years to die”<sup>17</sup> and seeing everything as an equally blissful art – preconceived or spontaneously captured, directed or natural, structured or arbitrary. Through one such liberation, the viewer immortalized in the following line from *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L’ABSOLU* is rescued from the desensitization of the senses, that is to say, from the blindness that confinement to the cinematic world imminently leads to:

A German, Erich Pommer, founder of Universal, today Matsushita Electronics, declared, “I will make the whole world cry in their armchair”. Can we say he succeeded? On one hand, it is true that newspapers and television all over the world only show death and tears. On the other end, those who stay and watch television have no tears left to cry. They unlearned to see.<sup>18</sup>

Is this the only thing Godard wishes to tell us with this symbolic act of obliterating the subject, then panning the camera away from it and toward the world,

<sup>15</sup> *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D’ELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 00:30:40.

<sup>16</sup> *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L’ABSOLU* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:26:10.

<sup>17</sup> Gould 2002.

<sup>18</sup> *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L’ABSOLU* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:06:30.

Fig. 3: PIERROT LE FOU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965): Pierrot, the symbol of the artist, is about to blow himself apart, annihilate the artist, and open the path to realization that life is greater than art.



that is, an open sea, as in *LE MÉPRIS* (FR/IT 1963) or *PIERROT LE FOU*, bearing resemblance to what Fellini also did in the 1960s, in *SATYRICON* (IT/FR 1969) and *JULIET OF THE SPIRITS* (IT/FR 1965)? Certainly not. In fact, when the artist is guided by the precept with which we opened this discourse, when he creates in concert with his intuition, allowing the work of art to create the artist as much as the artist creates the given work of art, he is bound to realize the multiplicity of meanings that have become embedded in the semantic substratum of the product of his creation, all without the artist's explicit intention. In fact, what distinguishes cinema from other forms of art is the infinite diversity of meanings ascribable to every scene and their every element – like in real life, where one sees eruptions of subtle positivism, another might see suppressed bitterness; where one sees lectures in morality, another might see cynicism, and so forth. In fact, one might argue that, in view of this correspondence between cinema and life, celluloid tapes should be obliged to engrain such multifaceted enactments; conversely, a naïve imposition of semantic linearity ought to be considered a cinematic sin *par excellence*. Oftentimes in addition to semantic multiplicity, there is also the contradiction – for example, the subject of prostitution frequently employed by Godard could be seen as submissive selling of one's soul to the devil for the sake of acceptance by society or as being enlightened in nature, coinciding with a wish to make everyone content even at the cost of one's own descent into moral lowlands, the two interpretations being diametrically opposed, the former utterly negative and the latter utterly positive with respect to the life of the protagonist. As if being lured by the simultaneous cursedness and blessedness of Sophocles's Oedipus at Colonus, Godard must have intuitively sensed that the embodiment of contradictions is a sign of greatness, in life yes, but all the more so in arts. Hence, there is no doubt that the repeated resorting to the subject of prostitution was Godard's way of attacking the streams of





Fig. 4: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LE CONTRÔLE DE L'UNIVERS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998). "So it's a braless blond followed by a detective scared of heights who will prove that this is all just cinema, which means it's child's play",<sup>19</sup> says Godard in his reflection on Hitchcock's *VERTIGO* (US 1958). The question is if we can make every science and art as playful, simple, intuitive, and unpretentious as the child's play that Godard's vision of filmmaking and quite possibly every other creative process was and liberate our minds from the stifling chains of adulterated extravagance thereby.

sell-out phoniness spilling out like vomit from corporate offices, grocery stores, coffee shops, concert venues, billboards, ads and TV, itself the reason why he has heartily refused to appear on TV all throughout his lifetime, but there is also a perpetual wonder whether prostitution as giving oneself wholly to another, albeit promiscuously, has also been a way of liberating the spirits of some of his favorite female protagonists. Take, for example, the ambiguous 360 degree panning shot preceding the final shot of *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE* – does it prove that the protagonist, Juliette Janson, has finally become the world, the way she had dreamt of, or does it demonstrate a sense of being more lost than ever in this inhumane, mechanical, soulless world of skyscrapers and sickening staginess? But that is the sign of the greatness of one's work – it cannot be pre-planned and it will keep the quarreling critics busy for ages to come.

Relying on one's intuitive skills in creation is, in a way, similar to handing Nature a piece of the paintbrush with which the images are drawn and making sure the co-creational process involving oneself and the world begins to resemble Escher's painting of two hands, each drawing the other, confounding the viewer in her every attempt to decipher who is drawing whom.<sup>20</sup> This approach

<sup>19</sup> HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LE CONTRÔLE DE L'UNIVERS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:15:20.

<sup>20</sup> Uskoković 2011; Uskoković 2015.





Fig. 5: 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967). The movie marks a turning point in Godard's career, for it is his first cinematic essay in which images are accompanied by the narration using his own voice and in which characters are repeatedly directed to break the fourth wall by gazing directly at the camera and introduce themselves to the viewer.

whereby one hands over one's authority, forsakes the role of a despot and humbly joins creative forces with multiple others is the only one that deserves the epithet of authentic when it comes to the art of filmmaking. For to become a filmmaker is to renounce any cravings to directly copy one's visions onto the screen and be aware that whatever the vision one wishes to have projected on the celluloid tape, the result will always be  $1+2+3=4$ ,<sup>21</sup> as Godard put it in the attempt to say that the actualization of the abstract in the cinematic realm always entails a partial fading of the abstract. Also, when he combines the images of bomber aircrafts and atrocities of fascistic regimes caught on tape with the word "Tout", that is, "Everything" as the answer to the question, "What does cinema want" in HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU, he insinuates the same point, namely spiritual, if not material fatalities whenever the filmmaker despotically aspires to copy one's inner visions onto the celluloid tape without any input of Nature and/or other people. Therefore, what the directorial element of the art of cinema teaches is creation in convergence with other people's visions and propensities. "False love means I don't change; true love means both you and I change", says Juliette in 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE, describing the essence of the art of filmmaking *bona fide*: one must not rigidly impose one's ideas onto the crew and the actors, but must live and change with them, making every take a surprise, a step leading in an unknown and unforeseen direction.

<sup>21</sup> Godard 1968, 242.

## QUESTIONING ART THROUGH ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Perhaps the most essential element of Godard's art, embraced unequivocally by all the French New Wave filmmakers, was the dual path of cinematic creation that the artist is supposed to follow. His 1967 manifesto, correspondingly, states only the following:

Fifty years after the October Revolution, the American industry rules cinema the world over. There is nothing much to add to this statement of fact. Except that on our own modest level we too should provoke two or three Vietnams in the bosom of the vast Hollywood-Cinecitta-Mosfilm-Pinewood etc. empire, and, both economically and aesthetically, struggling on two fronts as it were, create cinemas which are national, free, brotherly, comradely and bonded in friendship.<sup>22</sup>

The two fronts Godard mentions are points 1 and 2 of his 1970 manifesto,<sup>23</sup> reflecting the dual nature that a work of art is to ideally embody: (1) we must make political films; (2) we must make films politically. Hence, one of these paths leads to constructive critique of the art of cinema, a precept that goes back to Sartre's observation that the artist is, more than anything, expected to call into question the art itself.<sup>24</sup> The other one, however, leads to the provision of an absolute cinematic experience. Accordingly, one ought to strive to be a storyteller and inspire the audiences with the aesthetics of a plethora of elements of cinematic expression, from choreography to cinematography to character development and beyond, but at the same time one ought to pose implicit questions through one's art, questions that shake the reigning paradigms in the realm of cinema at their foundations. For some members of the French New Wave, such as Truffaut or Rohmer, this balance appeared to have been effortlessly maintainable. In the case of Godard, however, there was a pervasive inclination toward film critique at the cost of deliberately deconstructed and thoroughly *ad hoc* improvised storylines. Hence his famous remark, "I don't make movies; I make cinema."<sup>25</sup> It is for this reason that I revert to the point made earlier: has Godard only ever been just another film critic? Has his *raison d'être* ever changed after he left the position of a journalist at *Cahiers du Cinéma* and began to make auteurs' movies? Or could it be that he was still paying as much attention to narration as he was devoted to questioning the stale standards of commercial cinema, even when this attention was oriented toward destroying the dramaturgical shackles which confined cinema within their narrow limits and freeing it from the rusty clutches of theater for the first time since the dreams of Dziga Vertov and his man with a movie camera?

22 Godard 1968, 243.

23 Godard 1970.

24 Roud 1968, 8.

25 Coutard 2003.



Fig. 6: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998). Godard is intercepted in his reading by two displeased young spectators and asks them, "Did you like it?" "We keep seeing images of the art pieces, but never people", they say, hinting at Godard's lack of interest in characters on the account of the interest in criticizing the art of cinema through his cinematic works, epitomized in his saying, "I don't make movies, I make cinema", to which end he could be justifiably considered as a film critic, not necessarily a filmmaker in the classical sense of the word. "You are right – art first, and then, the men", responds Godard. "Don't you have a heart", asks back the annoyed young lady, to which Godard says, "We can film the work, not the hearts", before lighting up a cigarette and continuing his musings in now empty room, with his confronters long gone: "Some times have too many hands and not even hearts; yes, times without hearts but not without work. When an era is sick and lacks work for all hands, it sends us a new exhortation. The exhortation to work with our hearts instead of using our hands. And I haven't known a time, not yet, that lacked work for all hearts"<sup>26</sup>.

If that is true, then Godard might not have only wanted to challenge the conventions, but he might have also strived to be an inspirational storyteller, even when this storytelling involved a thorough deconstruction of the story or at times its almost complete abandonment, all until a hardly recognizable, semi-ruinous structure would be left in place of what could have been a lavish edifice, complying all the while to his own guideline: "To make an image, you have to unmake it."<sup>27</sup> Famously, in *2 OU 3 CHOSSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE*, Godard deliberates what to focus his storytelling on, the protagonist or an autumn leaf, concluding that "both, on this October evening, trembled slightly"<sup>28</sup> and mirroring his own hesitant outlook thereby. Thus, one could say that, cinematic anarchist as he is, his style of creative

<sup>26</sup> HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:24:30.

<sup>27</sup> Royer 1999.

<sup>28</sup> *2 OU 3 CHOSSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 00:47:00.



construction has been tied to dismantling and deconstructing the reigning standards of cinematic expression while simultaneously living up to the principle his hero Pierrot le Fou read to himself: “Language of poetry rises from the ruins.”<sup>29</sup>

## INSTRUCTIVENESS OF GODARD’S CONCEPTUAL APPROACH FOR NATURAL SCIENCES AND BEYOND

It is not unusual to find inspiration and guidance in a person who creatively expresses herself in a domain of the sciences, arts or humanities completely different from the one in which one expresses oneself. Natural scientist as I am, dividing my efforts between research and teaching, I unreservedly live up to this dual role that artistic creation as envisioned by Godard and his New Wave comrades ought to embody. Correspondingly, I believe that scientific presentations at conferences or in journals should always implicitly question the dominant presentation styles and methodological paradigms in parallel with providing meaningful basic and/or practical findings. To that end, my vision of a prolific scientist coincides with Godard’s vision of a complete artist as the one who uses his/her art to cleverly question the norms that dominate the field, while simultaneously telling an inspirational story and enriching the collective knowledge or ethos of humanity. However, as must have been known to Godard, following such an approach causes many doors to be shut in one’s face, the reason being the sheepish, gate-guarding, paradigm-obeying inclinations of the typical recognized member of academia and of reigning artistic circles. The interdisciplinary promiscuity of attempts to restore romanticism and renaissance in the heart of scientific enterprise, at times as playful and seditious as Nana from *VIVRE SA VIE*, will thus be punished by professional extermination by the regular straitlaced members of the academic universe, much like the treatment that awaited Nana herself or Joan of Arc, whom Nana sobbingly watched from the dark of the Panthéon theater at 13 rue Victor Cousin. “Follow that man; persecute Godard”,<sup>30</sup> the Spanish film critic Manolo Marinero wrote at the peak of Godard’s assault on the art of cinema, and much the same whisperings ring behind the back of all those who walk through the fields of science in a style straightforwardly assaultive to anything phony, insipid, and unpoetic in it. Regardless of these persecutions, you and I should not cease to live up to the ideal of being Lemmy Cautions, souls on a mission to crash the cold, deterministic brain behind the wheels of modern science and use poetry to conquer the sterilely rigid mechanism governing its workings, a mechanism run by a computer program, not the infinitely lively, unpredictable, and imaginative human intelligence.

29 PIERROT LE FOU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:45:20.

30 Aller 2014.

Fig. 7: *VIVRE SA VIE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 1962): Interdisciplinary inclinations that extend beyond the boundary of natural sciences and into the sphere of arts and humanities are seen these days as acts of promiscuity in need of severe reprimands by the scientific authorities. In spite of their belief that such ventures to the other side of the globe of human knowledge must compromise the quality of the science that such adventurers are capable of producing, the feeding of artistic senses and the viewing of science from socioeconomic, geopolitical, theological, and other perspectives can be powerful motivators to sustain its excellence.



In addition, we should strive to revolutionize the scientific writings in the same way Godard revolutionized the art of cinema, that is, by creating works that implicitly question and criticize its trends and clichés while feeding on improvisatory imaginativeness and anarchically disobeying any established principles and precepts, having no beginning or end in the classical sense of the word, like *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA*, but rather being mishmashes of impressions and ideas that magically trigger the pathways to enlightenment in the viewer. Godard's *TOUT VA BIEN* (with Jean-Pierre Gorin, FR/IT 1972) was to a great extent his protest against the brevity demanded of public commentaries, the reason why the striking workers deliberately deliver irksomely long monologues to the camera; similarly, my writings in which each sentence strives to be a universe unto itself are also a revolt against the expressional vulgarity of the modern Twitter age, wherein no elaborate unwinding of the threads of thoughts from here to the Moon is given space to in public forums, wherein snappy news has taken the place of lengthy social analyses, wherein daily communications come with the incisiveness of a knife rather than with the softness for the soul of a poem or a symphony that takes time to open, develop, and close, and wherein the characteristically Americanized simplicity of sentences has fully eclipsed the rollercoaster strings of words, with endless ups and downs and no end in sight, that typified the works of Hegel, Kant, Faulkner, Joyce, Kerouac, and many others, alongside this very sentence that is just about to come to its end. Still, unlike Godard, who openly admitted that he was a more skilled film critic than a filmmaker,<sup>31</sup> in the sense that he more efficiently shook the art of cinema than human hearts with his cinematic works, the ideal I impose onto myself and dis-

31 Cavett 1980.



seminate in the classroom is to be equally effective in both, that is, in bringing a multitude of aspects of scientific research and science communication into question and in carrying out research that shifts the paradigms and advances human knowledge and also inspires peers and the public to keep on investing their hearts and hands in the great adventure of the human mind called science.

This, of course, is one of many things Godard's art can instruct an aspiring glass bead game *magister ludi*<sup>32</sup>. The instructiveness of the conceptual anarchism of Godard's approach in the scientific domain, for example, lies in its fostering paradigm-shifting stances and feeding the sense of urgency to disobey the standards and counteract the clichés; after all, that is how every knowledge evolves – by challenging the canons instead of blindly conforming to the paradigms. Then, when Godard quotes a verse from Dante's *La divina commedia* in *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU*, “you wished to possess virtue in poverty”,<sup>33</sup> he also gives guidance as to how science could be made and presented: with the emphasis on indie, DIY simplicity, on Mother Teresa's aesthetics of poverty, using handmade drawings, modest setups, and minimalistic presentations instead of computerized images, expensive experimental settings, and convoluted wordings, dressing it all in simple and unpretentious clothes in search of a proof that mind rules over matter and ideas over technologies. Another instructive point comes from Godard's abolishment of the classical concept of the storyline in an effort to prove instead the ultimate beautifulness of a scene *per se* and its characters. Likewise, rather than their being components of a broader scheme or a plot, each sentence in a written work could be made a universe unto itself, a chain and a centerpiece at the same time, a symbolic proof that Nature is not a linear stream of events in space and time towards a predestined aim, but a magical place wherein destination is present in every point of the journey. The other side of this coin of attempting to craft sentences as universes is the utmost appreciation of every thought, every natural object, and every observable relationship, as if a whole universe lies dormant in the subtlest of them, with all of its secrets and treasures. For this reason, nothing is wasted in my scientific research and philosophical writings, not a single piece of data or luster of ideas, thus complying with Godard's habit of “throwing away very few shots and basically using everything that was shot”.<sup>34</sup> Then the scientific quest for discovery feeds on uncertainties, on permanent wonder over everything. Consequently, scientific communications ought to pulsate with the spirit of uncertainty and be intercepted with mumbles and staggers more often than those of rock stars stonewalling interviewers; this is where their similarity with

32 Hesse 1943.

33 Dante, *Divine Comedy*, Purgatory, Canto 10, 26, cited at *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998).

34 Karina 2002.



Godard's film comes into play, wherein gestures and dialogues emerge from a collective sense of uncertainty and, exactly because of that, become infused with a spirit that captivates the viewer. In that sense, thanks to Godard's insistence that actors should never get fully into their stage characters and leave their real-life characters behind, Godard's film could be even said to have contributed to the birth of mumblecore, a rare fresh new genre of the American indie film, alongside being true to Truffaut's vision of *La Nouvelle Vague* as "not a 'new' cinema, but a realer and more believable cinema"<sup>35</sup> than the "compartmentalized", theatrical French cinema "ruled over by an Inquisition-like regime",<sup>36</sup> as Godard christened the tradition against which he heartily rebelled in the 1960s.

In dissecting the ideological core of Godard's filmmaking in an attempt to discern the source of these intrinsic questions, David Sterritt recognized three major influences: (a) Brecht's idea of the epic theater, which would, unlike the traditional, dramatic theater, circumvent the emotional identification of the spectator with the characters or events on the stage and prompt self-reflection instead, playing a metacognitive role to that end and influencing the viewer from a deeper angle, affecting his/her worldviews and subsequent effects on the world more than a theatrical experience built on climactic catharsis; (b) Dziga Vertov's idea that preconceived visions should give way to images emerging from spontaneous encounters between the eye of the camera and the world in the most genuine form of filmmaking; and (c) Mao Zedong's "commitment to the Third World as a key site of struggle against bourgeois oppression and super-power imperialism".<sup>37</sup> Every element of this triad can be found in the approach to creative expression in natural sciences idealized here. As for (a), for example, the way of presenting science that I have championed is all about forsaking the style that would be comparable to watching a soap opera wherein one finds a momentary emotional solace, may laugh and decompress, but eventually leaves it without deep insight, the style that is common among the most appreciated instructors and presenters in natural sciences today. As in accordance with Brecht's idea of the epic theater, the teaching method I proponed is based on the renouncement of camaraderie and the embracement of remoteness and secrecy, all so as to spur self-analysis, foster individuality, and perpetuate nonconformity. For science, like everything else, evolves by drawing differences, not by having everyone confirm the paradigm and try hard to be yet another sheep in the flock. This is not to say that science is to be deprived of a sense of geniality; rather, it is to say that the sense of unity and integrity, the peak of every creative expression, as ever, is best achieved when it comes from such depths of our

35 Laurent 2010.

36 Labarthe 1964.

37 Sterritt 1997.



Fig. 8: 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967). The final image, of a colorful graveyard composed of boxes of detergents and other inanimate denizens of supermarket shelves, epitomizes the essence of the deliberately shallow pop artiness; does it arise from a state of true enlightenment or from sheer stupidity and years of brainwashing with the surface values? Not incidentally at all, in this miniature model of a luxurious high-rise *banlieue* of Paris, itself a model of an alienating urban landscape, itself a model of modern society, one finds a box of Hollywood bubblegum.

being that not even the finest traces of submission to social standards could be found therein. Still, science is indisputably a social question and must be analyzed from a variety of nonscientific perspectives in order to be approached in a creative fashion. For this reason, the narrowness and linearity of the scientific method followed by the academic masses is mercilessly fought against in my lab and classroom, all in an attempt to lift this new generation of scientists to the top of Bloom's taxonomy pyramid, where the creative and the metacognitive intersect.<sup>38</sup> As for (b), the aim has been to discard the old, rigid way of presenting science, be it in the written or the oral form, and substitute it with a style that signifies spontaneity and more veritably reflects the route to innovative ideas along the corridors of the human mind, which is such that it relies on analogies, poetry, swells of aesthetic senses and intuitive flashes of light along the way. As for (c), the idea that siding with the disempowered must be the way to go in my roaming through the chambers of the Kafkaesque castle that the Ivory Tower is has been another guiding light, the reason why everything, from experimental methods to research subjects to researchers and collaborators to research locations to political voices aired through these lungs, has been adjusted to afflict the affluent and uplift the poor and the underprivileged.

Last but not least, yet another thing Godard could instruct one in is attention to detail, the awareness of the enormous power of the minutest of actions

<sup>38</sup> Pintrich 2002.



or images. Science, needless to add, is in need of frames of mind capable of plunging into the finest details of physical systems, focusing on events that are incredibly small and yet finding a universe therein, a universe that will speak endless stories about the explorer's life and guide her/him along the way. Or, as Godard himself put it in his celebration of the colossal power of minute details decorating the silver screen,

We forgot why Joan Fontaine leans over the cliff edge. And what was Joel McCrea doing in Holland? We forgot why Montgomery Clift remains forever silent and why Janet Leigh stops at the Bates Motel and why Teresa Wright is still in love with Uncle Charlie. We forgot what Henry Fonda is not entirely guilty of, why exactly the American government hired Ingrid Bergman. But we remember a handbag. But we remember a bus in the desert. But we remember a glass of milk, the sails of a windmill, a hairbrush. But we remember a row of bottles, a pair of glasses, a music sheet, a set of keys. Because through them and with them, Alfred Hitchcock succeeded where Alexander, Julius Caesar, Hitler, Napoleon failed. Take control of the universe.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, from Citizen Kane's Rosebud (CITIZEN KANE, Orson Welles, US 1941) to Zuzu's petals (Frank Capra, IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, US 1946) to the steamed bun from GOODBYE, DRAGON INN (Tsai Ming-liang, TWN 2003) to Don Corleone's lighter (Francis Ford Coppola, GODFATHER, US 1972) to the executioner's straw hat in Berlanga's EL VERDUGO (ES/IT 1963) to the pocket rose of Conductor 71 in A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH (Michael Powell / Emeric Pressburger, GB 1946) to Veronica Voss's vase in Fassbinder's VERONICA VOSS (DE 1982) to Frederic's pull-over in Eric Rohmer's L'AMOUR L'APRÈS-MIDI (FR 1972) to the stone with which Fellini's Fool solaced saddened Gelsomina in LA STRADA (IT 1954) to Juliette's "galactic"<sup>40</sup> cup of coffee in 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE, cinema is teeming with signs that implicitly speak in favor of the beauty of small things, of finding the ladder that leads the searcher to the peaks of his quest for the meaning of life in the littlest details of reality.

All in all, reminiscing over Godard's conceptual approach to filmmaking has been an inexhaustible source of motivation for and clarification of the mission I have strived to accomplish in the realm of science. It is to carpet-bomb everything that is dull, prosaic, rigidly formal, uninventive, gate-guarding, amoral, devoid of metaphysical curiosity, and unappreciative of the poetic sensibility on the surface of science today and to allow for the flowers of wild unconventionality, poetic imagination, egoless wonder, philosophical profundity, anchoring in metaphysical and moral values, and, more than anything, love to sprout from some greater depths.

39 HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LE CONTRÔLE DE L'UNIVERS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:12:20.

40 Vaughan 2012, 67.





Fig. 9. LE MÉPRIS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1963): The perplexed artist, the image of a muse, and the wall between them. Characters looking away, distancing themselves mentally and emotionally from one another, is a perpetual motif in Godard's film. Is it a sign of contempt, i.e. *le mépris*, for the society that, as Godard must have deemed, is necessary to elicit the qualities of enlightened being? Does it stem from the belief that one must reject society if one is to find one's true self and deliver the highest potential of one's being to the world?

## CEASELESS CONTRADICTION OF ONESELF AS THE ANARCHISTIC ROUTE TO FREEDOM

Godard would not be Godard if he did not contradict all, even his dearest, convictions, including the postmodern idea that the role of art is to abolish art in order to point at the infinite beauty of being. This is why he opens his latest movie, *ADIEU AU LANGAGE*, with the claim that “those lacking imagination take refuge in reality”.<sup>41</sup> Rewind the loop of time to almost half a century earlier and you will find two nerds named Bouvard and Pécuchet as a reference to Flaubert's eponymous novel sitting in a café in *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE*, randomly pulling sentences from a towering pile of books and finding the long-sought moment of enlightenment in Heidegger's thought that “thought is not merely a quest for non-thought; thought as such is bound to the birth of being; being has always been destined for thought, but also for being as the destiny of thought”,<sup>42</sup> suggesting the inextricable connectedness between beautiful being as the birthplace of illuminative thought and illuminative thought as the road leading to the doorsteps of beautiful being. Whether thought precedes being or the other way around we no longer know, but by finding ourselves in this insoluble circle, all rules have become

41 *ADIEU AU LANGAGE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 2014), 00:00:05.

42 *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 01:01:20.

momentarily broken and everything has become possible. Fences screening the sun of our mental celestial sphere have collapsed and its shine escapes toward the infinity. Of course, when all rules are shattered and no rule is left to be followed, any rule can be abided by too. Attained in such a manner is freedom that liberates oneself from the prison that confinement within the limits of any artistic expression inevitably bears: not only are no principles needed to be followed anymore, but all of them could be followed altogether if we so wished. A freedom and a guide – such is the destination toward which Godard's movies lead one.

The ethos of Godard's film often coincides with that of a rebel who stands against the society perceived as foul *per se*. For example, in *LE MÉPRIS*, the movie made out of the personal feeling for the film industry suggested by its title, Contempt, the artist forfeits his dreams and gives away his muse – in the same way Ulysses ditched Penelope for ten long years – to a personification of the raw money-centrism of the big fish in the pond, be they producers, editors, research funders, or venture capitalists whose only consideration is marketability and profitability. Eventually the artist learns that the works so dear to his heart turn dead if they happen to be moved only by the power of money and convention rather than by genuine trueness to oneself, along with cliché-shattering innovativeness, such as that which typified Joyce's reflection on the Homer's epic or Godard's filming style in general. This society that Godard's heroes push and shove is, however, not society in the real sense of the word, communal and bonded by love, but society governed by selfish motives and one-against-many ideals – a cancerous society wherein the intention of individuals threatens to eclipse the whole with their presumptuous greatness. To that end, they launch war against war – a non-Gandhian approach that is, to say the least, questionable in its effectiveness. Still, in spite of their assuming the somewhat arrogant stance of a Wild West outlaw in a modern setting, Godard's protagonists do serve the role of poking the audience and making them aware that something is missing in their lives, something sacred that they themselves would never talk about, albeit something coinciding with the virtues celebrated by sages the world over. This is why Lemmy Caution, that “saver of those who weep”,<sup>43</sup> believes in poetry as the force that “turns darkness into light”<sup>44</sup> and that can transcend the boundaries of the portentous city of *Alphaville*, in which art was abandoned and substituted by emotionless technocracy, a city governed by artificial intelligence and inhabited by heartless, zombified, machine-like creatures programmed “not to ask Why, but only say Because”.<sup>45</sup> To that end, God-

43 ALPHAVILLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:29:40.

44 ALPHAVILLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:48:40.

45 ALPHAVILLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:52:20.



Fig. 10: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998). Superimposition of the dancer and the dreamer – which one holds the truth (and beauty)?

ard's heroes live up to the idea that to talk about a thing is to lose its essence out of sight. And so they don't talk much. And they are perfectly right, that is, as it were, left.

### WHAT'S FREEDOM WITHOUT LOVE?

As an art critic with training in natural sciences who approaches criticism with a dose of scalar literalness, I would never dare give 10/10 or 0/10 ratings to anything. Rather, I praise the keenness that comes from recognizing the taints of imperfection even in the most fantastic of expressions and the humbleness that comes from accepting that even in complete artsy garbage there will be a diamond or two to be found. Whoever remembers *LA PARESSE* (FR 1962), one of Godard's early shorts and a statement in defense of sloth, the deadly sin that, as Godard showed, could stand in the way of other, deadlier sins and pave the way for morality, can be prompted to recognize beauty even in the trashiest of works and redeem their kitsch with kindness, as pop artists and saintly souls would do anyway. The dangers of dogmatism and idolatry that 10/10 or 0/10 ratings lead to need not be mentioned either. This, as you may guess, is a prelude to the claim that, like everything else, Godard's art abounds with taints of imperfections. So what would I change in Godard's films if I could? For one, I would ask him why he was more interested in carpet-bombing the cinema world of his day than in rejuvenating it with new aesthetics pleasing for the soul, an approach that would have earned him the status of a true renaissance master of the new age had he succeeded in it. Then, what if everything that was political in his movies was made poetic? For the resonance of political messages fades



away with time, when contexts change, whereas the poetic expression endows art with timelessness and is what reserves it a space in the pantheon of eternal relevance. Has Godard been but a mighty freedom fighter, a rebel blinded by revulsion, who has forgotten about freedom's greatest complement in life – love? Did he speak from his heart when he said in 1966 that “the only film I really want to make, I’ll never make because it is impossible. It’s a film about love, or from love, or with love.”<sup>46</sup> Those familiar with his insistence on creating cinema that is “national, free, brotherly, comradely and bonded in friendship”<sup>47</sup> and those who still remember the ending of *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965) would have disagreed, but those looking at the grander scale of things and those who know that love cannot be put into words, but must be implicit in the totality of one’s expressions as well as in the minutest gestures, might be pleased to muse longer over this point. Yet, where to search for this gestural signs of love and sympathy considering Godard’s habit of reducing faces to expressionless busts, frequently hiding them behind read books and routinely presenting them to the audience from such angles and distances so that the emotional connection between the characters and the viewer is not encouraged but rather averted? It can be assumed that Godard wished to demonstrate that the crushing of the shell of behavioral conventionality and conformity to social norms produces a sense of distantness that, in fact, brings one closer to other people on far deeper cognitive levels and closer to that Hegelian merging of oneself and the world into an indissoluble oneness as “the ultimate aim of Godard’s dialectics”.<sup>48</sup> Hence the message of the moment when Joseph and Mary in *JE VOUS SALUE, MARIE* (Jean-Luc Godard, CH/FR 1984) discover that love coincides not with the act of coming closer to another, but with the one of moving away, of retreating, as if “to leave space for the desire of the other”.<sup>49</sup> Still, the shadow of a doubt remains, revolving around the question of what if all of this is merely a wishful spin on what deep down are the symptoms of that misanthropic pathology recognized by Erich Fromm, where one could feel an intimate relatedness to people, love, as it were, only insofar as one stays secluded from them.<sup>50</sup>

Yet another thing I would change in Godard’s movies is the choreographic aesthetics – what if he had made *PIERROT LE FOU* or *Lemmy Caution* move with the same grace with which Monica Vitti or Setsuko Hara glided through space in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’AVVENTURA* (IT/FR 1960) and Yasujiro Ozu’s *Noriko Trilogy* (JPN 1949–1953), respectively, the way Satyajit Ray’s *Charulata* (CHARU-

46 Kristensen 2014.

47 Godard 1968, 243.

48 Taubin 2009.

49 Kristensen 2014.

50 Fromm 1956.



Fig. 11: *Vivre sa vie* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 1962): Nina watching Dreyer's *JOAN OF ARC* (*LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC*, FR 1928) in the dark of the Panthéon cinema. The watcher becomes the watched that is the watcher that is the watched. Every book is thus written by a scribe; she writes the book, but the book, in turn, writes her, too.

LATA, IND 1964) walked leisurely across her little Calcutta palace with binoculars in her hands, or the way the young maid from de Sica's *UMBERTO D* (IT 1952) ran errands and opened the window shutters in that old house where dreams of past ages were smeared over the musty walls, if not in the overly flagrant way David Lynch had Sherilyn Fenn move in *Twin Peaks*<sup>51</sup>, as if through a dream of a kind? How come that Godard admired the Little Tramp more than any character that has ever walked across the movie screen, labeling him "the greatest of all",<sup>52</sup> yet refused Chaplin's idea that the poetry of movement paired with music for the soul is the essence of the art of cinema? Could it be that he who asked us to "make sure we use everything we communicate using silence and stillness"<sup>53</sup> failed to implement this point because his anarchistic convictions prevented him from directing with an iron fist, failing to motivate with the authority and the charisma of an Orson Welles, producing as a result somewhat lukewarm emotions on the set? Or, in contrast, could it be that the frequent affectedness of his actors on the screen was the consequence of his directing them too explicitly, oftentimes requesting specific gestures without evoking the right emotion in the actor, thus opposing the directing style of first his comrade, then his nemesis, Francois Truffaut, who would typically tell Jean-Pierre Léaud to simply imagine immersion in a specific social context and then allow the proper action to be spontaneously elicited before the camera, without explicit instruction. Now, the question is whether Godard's symbolic messages would have gained a greater strength had they been coupled to a greater degree of emotionality. Or maybe his message of revolt against everything tied to the modern age and the idea that society and language must be chains that shackle the human spirit and diminish its inner potential would not be transmittable had Godard done so. On the other hand, the large-scale release of one's art implies one's compliance with certain social standards, even if they govern the circles of social

51 *TWIN PEAKS* (David Lynch / Mark Frost, US 1990–1991).

52 Godard 1968, 202.

53 *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: FATALE BEAUTÉ* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1997), 00:11:30.



rejects, which makes one wonder whether the absolute anarchistic rejection of submission to social norms as a key message of his films was hypocritical to some extent, in spite of his frequent reference to the subject of prostitution in an attempt to convey the message that “advertising is a pimp and we are its whores”.<sup>54</sup> In any case, as pointed out by David Sterritt, “Godard’s audience must decide whether he and his troops are winning this battle (for freedom) on our behalf, or whether ‘freedom is killing freedom’ in a political-aesthetic skirmish that may prove Pyrrhic at the final fade-out”.<sup>55</sup>

Asked if he had ever “registered a script for a film”, Godard says, “My scripts are registered in everybody’s daily routine, including yours, so all you have to do is take a look at your own life and you will surely find thousands of them”,<sup>56</sup> hinting at the failure of narrative in an absolute cinematic experience. Similarly, when he was asked at a press conference why his films never have a story, he asked back “what’s a story?”<sup>57</sup> and then, ironically, told a story about his parents telling him “not to tell stories” when he was a child and “made up a lot of things”, the advice that would make Bergman’s Alexander Ekdahl<sup>58</sup> blink with surprise, but the one he continued to listen to throughout his entire career. Consequently, as a sign of revolt against cinema driven by the narrative and cinema as but the right hand of the theater, the concept of the storyline has gradually faded in Godard’s movies as his career progressed. So they evolved from (a) story-driven *À BOUT DE SOUFFLE* to (b) mid- and late-*La Nouvelle Vague* period, during which he did not reject the concept of the story probably because he knew that it could be deconstructed only insofar as the story is told in one form or the other, to (c) his political documentary era and, finally, to (d) stream-of-consciousness video works in which no storylines or plots whatsoever were left to be deployed, returning to the anti-plot ideology intrinsic to the plot of Godard’s fellow *Cahiers du Cinéma* critic’s, Jacques Rivette’s, *PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT* (FR 1961), a nucleus around which most pioneers of *La Nouvelle Vague* gathered and which in many respects helped launch the movement as a whole. As a reminder, this homage to the aesthetics of Mystery is about a girl caught in a twisted plot revolving around her seeking to solve the murder of a poet who “was plotting”,<sup>59</sup> a plot that, as it turned out, was a product of ill imagination of, not accidentally, an American in Paris. In the course of this search, her dear friend and the director of the play in which she acted was murdered, insinuating all the harm caused by the concept of the plot and its devoted following. The

54 Sédouy and Harris 1966.

55 Sterritt 1997.

56 Royer 1999.

57 Royer 1999.

58 FANNY OCH ALEXANDER (Ingmar Bergman, SE 1982).

59 *PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT* (Jacques Rivette, FR 1961), 00:59:30.



anti-plot message of the movie served as a major inspiration for the French New Wave directors, who went on to either completely reject or heavily distort plots in their subsequent movies.

Still, from his earliest to his latest works, Godard's movies, even when they have a story, have no plot whatsoever, if we were to employ the distinction between the two terms proposed by E. M. Forster.<sup>60</sup> In his later works in particular, Godard deconstructed the plot and the dialogue to the point of impossibility of predicting or insinuating what will be said or done by a character next. In such a manner, as in *FILM SOCIALISME* (FR/CH 2010), he portrayed a brighter future of verbal communication, while immersing the viewer into a magical space of anarchic freedoms that liberates the spirit as no cinematic expression revolving around a narrative thread can do, alongside creating an authentic Brechtian experience, which may be boring, painful, or perplexing to the audience but will have the viewers leave the cinema hall enriched with a sprinkling of divine sense to be disseminated into the world, influencing them deeper and more lastingly than the most captivating, amusing, and mouthwatering plots are able to achieve. One could argue that Richard Linklater's switch from one central character to the next in the Austin, Texas, classic *SLACKER* (US 1990) would have been a natural progression in Godard's rejection of storytelling in the 1960s, as implied by his aversion to character development and erasure of any traces of central threads in his plots. This, however, raises some questions: for one, aren't all pieces of art analogous to trees or rivers or cities, to whose central lines and avenues one could always return after roaming around little passageways? Yes, freedom is being won and burdens vanish like charms from the back of the minds carrying visions of monumental constructs on their shoulders, but wouldn't it all be reduced to the chaotic arrangement of stars of the night sky and be drowned into an eternal entropy of things had we abandoned the detailed structuration of our works? Arguments could be, of course, given in favor (a) of life's not having a distinct classical storyline intrinsic to it, (b) of Godard's making sense when he noticed that "life is so different from books"<sup>61</sup> in *PIERROT LE FOU* and rejected the Aristotelian division into the sacred triad composed of the opening, the climax, and the resolution, and (c) of the fact that a Godard or a Cassavetes movie, always plotless, evolving unpredictably, reflects life more veritably than any preconceived dramaturgical wholes. Godard could be accused of being megalomaniacal at times as well. "I wanted to include everything: sports, politics, even groceries. Everything should be put in a film", he says, echoing Gustav Mahler's aspiration to compose symphonies that are "like the world – they must embrace everything".<sup>62</sup> Whether

60 Forster 1927.

61 *PIERROT LE FOU* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:14:00.

62 Hefling 2002.

Fig. 12: WEEK-END (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967). The epic final screenshot drawing the curtain on cinema in Godard's eyes and on the entire *La Nouvelle Vague* era. The carpet bomb was detonated, everything that made cinema what it was lay deconstructed and demolished, and the end of cinema as we had known it could be announced. Would all other social spheres be revitalized, fostered to evolve at an unprecedented rate or simply be sentenced to permanent desertion and infertility had everybody's aim been to create something similar to what Godard strived to create under this "the end of cinema" banner, that is, to shatter the paradigm, to get rid of the old, to erase the standards and, effectively, abolish the need for the given sphere to exist under the Sun?



that was an honest aim, especially in view of the limitations of cinema that Godard strived to explicate in his cinematic expression, we know not, but we could endlessly talk about. Whether that was also a goal that could be proven passé in view of (a) the pending shifts to punk and electro minimalism that many pop arts were to undergo shortly after the pretentious, prog-rock, Sgt. Pepperish trends paralleling the peak of *La Nouvelle Vague* were over, and (b) the minimalism that the European cinema had to embrace to differentiate itself from the pageantry of Hollywood, we know not either. With all these things changed, maybe everything in Godard's art that resonated solely with the 1960s generation would have been made timeless and maybe even *WEEK-END* (FR/IT 1967), that parody of almost every single feature of the Hollywood blockbusters of the 1960s, would be a more relevant movie today than it is. As it stands now, understanding Godard requires perceiving him from a stance well familiarized with the history of cinema. Even more importantly, it requires focusing on the invisibles, on that implicit message hidden at the conceptual, not plainly visible, level of expression. The subtlety of such an approach to communication, of course, presents beauty in itself.

## ART FOR THE DIMINISHMENT OF THE ART'S SAKE

Still, wonder remains if all these drawbacks were deliberate, serving the purpose of annihilating oneself for the sake of becoming One with all that there is; destroying the cinema for the sake of pulling the dreamers away from its darkened rooms and into the daylight of life, the destination of every dreamer's dream. In his most recent movie, *ADIEU AU LANGAGE*, Godard toys with the ety-



mological curiosity that the Russian word for camera was derived from the word for prison. This is a natural addition to the question Roland receives in WEEK-END, “Are you in a film or in reality?”<sup>63</sup> hinting at this blurring of the boundary between art and life that presents the central goal of Godard’s filmmaking. To shatter the camera and symbolically erase the distinction between art and life is thus an act analogous to crushing the prison walls and allowing the prisoner, a metaphor for the moviegoer, to escape into freedom. One could perceive the proposition of this analogy as a culmination of the artist’s working towards self-annihilation as the most sublime act on his spiritual quest, the act that uses art to destroy the very art in question and point at life as art itself, an art more artistic than any of the formally presented pieces of art in museums, galleries, music halls, and cinemas. The ultimate point of this anarchic endeavor is, of course, for an artist to disappear and make way for life, the beauty of which all arts have been pointing out anyway. PIERROT LE FOU, for example, the personification of an artist in this postmodern cinematic milestone and an archetypical post-modernist anti-film, first leaves society behind to run away with his muse, only eventually to sacrifice her and then, in an effort to show us the beauty of life untainted by human pettiness and sinful spirits, commit suicide, killing himself, the artist and the art, ending it all with a view of the endless sea, the symbol of the utmost spiritual fulfillment that is the death of one’s ego and the merging of the self with the omnipresent ocean of transcendental being encompassing everything. ’Tis the blissful moment in which everything becomes the emanation of the most wonderful art conceivable and in which we could repeat after Juliette from 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D’ELLE: “I am the world”.<sup>64</sup> ’Tis the moment at which we enter the state of utmost spiritual poverty and become blessed in an instant (Matthew 5:3). Freed from corporeal bonds and artificial attractors, we become tied to it all and, like Joseph from JE VOUS SALUE, MARIE, able to touch the most precious of natural details without touching them physically. ’Tis also the painful moment in which art, as a concept, along with the artist, a conscious creator of something more sublime than the all-pervading beauties of the commonest of things surrounding us, ceases to exist. If we disobey this call and delay the death of our ego and of the formal artist, the creator in us, the chance is that we might find ourselves in the shoes of the painter from VIVRE SA VIE, he who zealously portrayed muses and, as the last tint on his painting was drawn, stood up, marveled over his accomplishment, and concluded that “this is Life itself”.<sup>65</sup> However, when he turned his eyes away from the canvas to look at the living muses walking next to him, muses whom he had painted so devotedly, he

63 WEEK-END (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 01:03:40.

64 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D’ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 00:30:40.

65 VIVRE SA VIE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 1962), 01:18:30.





Fig. 13: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998). "... here is the question, it's bigger than India, England or Russia, it's the small child inside the mother's womb".

realized that they have long disappeared into the dark of the night. If the key attempt of Godard's filmmaking was to use cinema as a tool that obliterates that very same tool and shows us the beauty of life, the only faithful way to end this essay is to use the words piled up here as a tool to destroy that very same tool and, like Wittgenstein at the end of his debut treatise<sup>66</sup>, leave us speechless and in awe under the starry sky of life and its infinite beauties, lying beyond what any camera or pen could capture. The purpose of this whole array of words is, therefore, to make the reader look away from them, being the same goal that Godard strived to attain throughout his entire filmmaking career. For, what point other than this could Godard be making with the opening scene of *LA PARESSE*, where the female protagonist reads a book and the page she reads shows an unpunctuated, grammatically broken excerpt from Beckett's *Comment C'est*: "Suddenly afar the step the voice nothing then suddenly something something then suddenly nothing suddenly afar the silence"<sup>67</sup> "Reality", after all, "is too complex for oral communication", as it is said in the opening scene of *ALPHAVILLE*, and all that language is, as Juliette from *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE* reminds us, is "the house man lives in",<sup>68</sup> suggesting the safety and comfort that abiding in it brings, but equally insinuating that the most exciting things, life as it were, happen strictly outside of it.

<sup>66</sup> Wittgenstein 1922.

<sup>67</sup> Beckett 1961, 11.

<sup>68</sup> *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 00:10:55.

Indeed, this space outside the verbal and the cinematic frames is where the world begins. And ends too. So I leave you here. Beyond words, at the entrance to life lived to its fullest. It is in a moment like this that Apu tosses his treasured notes into the wind (APUR SANSAR, IND 1959) and Kurosawa's woodcutter Kikori leaves behind the inextricably looped and labyrinthine lines drawn by the mental pen (RASHOMON, JPN 1950), and they both lift a child up into the air. At the same moment, on the opposite, darker side of the globe, as Godard's heroine becomes liberated from the city of *Alphaville* and is on her way to the Outlands, where she could afford to be an outsider and a beautiful spirit once again, she forgets language and comes up with all the words she would need on this new, celestial plane of reality whereon life is lived, not only vainly discussed: "I... You... Love... I Love You."<sup>69</sup> It is then that we realize that no Word could save the world. Only life can save life. It is then that silhouettes begin to dance on the walls, with shadows of eucalyptus trees and swaying snowdrop wildflowers. It is then that we wave a soft goodbye to language, that good old corruptor of feeling and the source of hypocrisies that have plagued humanity and sickened human spirits ever since its dawn. It is then that firmaments begin to shake with love and the wonder of a child, untainted and infinitely pure, born to this world. Hence the sound of a baby crying in the dying moments of Godard's most recent movie, his characteristically convoluted farewell to language. Or, as put forth by Godard himself in HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU:

Squabbling about public indignation, nothing more pathetic. Toning down makes things worse. Subtlety pleads for barbarism. Let's call things by their name. Killing a man in the Bondy Forest or Black Forest is a crime. Killing a country in the other forest called diplomacy is a crime as well, but just bigger. Where will it stop? When will the martyr of this heroic small nation end? So they tell us, "You forget there are some questions". Killing a man is a crime. Killing a country is a question. Each government has its question. We answer, "Humanity also has a question". And here is the question, it's bigger than India, England or Russia, it's the small child inside the mother's womb.<sup>70</sup>

Hence the reduction of the consciousness to that of a preverbal child, Taoist in nature, aware that "arguing is unwise" (Tao Te Ching 81), feeling all the way through "as if I were the world and the world were me",<sup>71</sup> presents the last and the final step of our walking in Godard's anarchic footsteps through this enticing cinematic forest, in search of a flower here, a balloon there, and the whisper of *Je vous aime* everywhere.

69 ALPHAVILLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 01:38:20.

70 HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:04:00.

71 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 01:04:00.



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## Media Review



Philippe Bornet

## Book Review

### Jean-Luc Maroy, **LE SACRIFICE d'Andreï Tarkovski: une parabole sur le temps de la fin**

Paris: L'Harmattan 2017, 472 pp., ISBN: 978-2-8061-0350-5

This detailed study of Andreï Tarkovsky's *THE SACRIFICE* (SE/GB/FR 1986) is a revised version of a doctoral thesis in Catholic practical theology defended at the University of Louvain. It is structured around three main parts: an introduction to Tarkovsky's cinematographic practices, an analysis of various scenes of *THE SACRIFICE*, and a theological comment on major themes.

In the first part (19–104), “l'esthétique tarkovskienne”, Jean-Luc Maroy situates *THE SACRIFICE* within the director's entire oeuvre. Referring to Tarkovsky's own assessment of his work, his autobiographical essay *Sculpting in Time*,<sup>1</sup> Maroy emphasizes that art, for Tarkovsky, is an evocative or symbolic way to suggest a sense of a “real truth” or of the absolute. According to Maroy, Tarkovsky considers art as an expedient to evoke deeper levels of reflection, to raise spiritual questions, and, more specifically given the context of the 20th century, to counter the western culture of materialism and consumption. Nature and landscape are revalorized as a “sacred mystery”, a mystery that has been forgotten by the majority of people in modern times. As Maroy convincingly shows, these intentions run through most of Tarkovsky's eclectic production, from *SOLARIS* (SU 1972) to *STALKER* (SU 1979) and *THE SACRIFICE*. Aiming at awakening a critical reflection among his putative watchers, Tarkovsky's filmmaking is then the exact opposite of Soviet cinema, in which the images and the ideological message they were supposed to convey were under strict control. The audience, however, was not always as open to being questioned, resulting in a mixed reception. Similarly, the “spiritual” element has often escaped the attention of both the general public and critics, so that, as the author legitimately claims, the present work can be considered as filling a research desideratum.

This first part provides an excellent summary of Tarkovsky's aesthetics and proves to be particularly valuable for the rest of the analysis. Two questions could be further developed. The first concerns Tarkovsky's own complicated re-

<sup>1</sup> Tarkovsky 1986.



lation to religion. As noted in the third part (363–364), despite identifying as an Orthodox Christian, the director never entirely embraced this identity and, like many of his contemporaries, seems to have been skeptical about the institutional (or normative) aspect of religion. This raises the question of how this ambiguous relation did (or did not) impact the representation of religious themes in his work – a question which is tackled by the author but which could be drawn out further, although it might very well be that sources to reconstruct this are simply missing. A second point is whether Tarkovsky's appreciation of his own work should always be taken at face value, especially since his autobiographical book is a late retrospective reconstruction of his career. But again, external sources might be scarce.

The study of religious or spiritual aspects in *THE SACRIFICE* is an important part of the second part (105–337), “analyse et interprétation”, which begins with the history of the film's genesis. The film is convincingly presented as closely entangled with the director's own life: as the main protagonist, Alexander, Tarkovsky himself can be seen as devoting his life to raising a certain awareness about materialism, the lack of spirituality among his contemporaries, or the ecological peril (133). As such, the director could appear as a kind of prophet in the apocalyptic zeitgeist of the cold war and its nuclear threats – incidentally, the film's first projection in April 1986 coincided with the Tchernobyl disaster (128–129).

There follows a detailed and systematic analysis of the film with a focus on “spiritual” themes. Underlining the arbitrary character of a clear-cut division of shots and sequences – something particularly true for a film which precisely aims at breaking away from pre-established structures – the author suggests a well-thought subdivision into 121 shots and 15 sequences (138). This subdivision is centered around three temporal elements: (1) the time before the catastrophe (sequences 1 to 4), (2) the catastrophe itself, the consequences of a nuclear war, the promise made by Alexander to God to sacrifice himself if time is reversed, and the recourse to “faith” as the only way out (sequences 5 to 12), and (3) the revelation that time was actually reversed in exchange for Alexander's fulfillment of his promise to burn his house and to remain silent for the rest of his life (sequences 13–15). The author proceeds then to analyze the soundtrack: music, noises from nature, and noises produced by humans. Maroy shows that sounds are particularly crucial here as they are often associated with the evocation of a “spiritual world” or with symbolical meanings – in particular, Bach's aria from the St. Matthew Passion “*Erbarme dich*”, suggesting the mood of bitter regret that is central to the film. The next section is devoted to a close analysis of each of the 156 shots (188–272), a difficult task but successfully carried out. Here, particular attention is paid to the composition of scenes, to the movement of actors and the camera, and to the soundtrack, with interesting comparisons between scenes and many insightful interpretations. The last

sequence of the film – the little boy carrying buckets, walking on the seaside and watering a tree – receives special attention (263–271) because it involves a rich set of questions about aspects that are central to the study: the relation between Alexander and his son, which can metaphorically relate to the relation between God and his son, Jesus; the expectation that the boy will continue caring about the tree even without immediate results, evoking the centrality of belief; or the boy's enigmatic question, "Why is that, Papa?", resounding as an existential interrogation about the world and the position of mankind itself.

The ensuing analysis (272–337) focuses on several major recurring themes studied transversally and comparatively: for example, the protagonists' sleep and dreams, time's reversibility, silence and mystery, love and sacrifice expressed and manifested by the protagonists, and insanity (in relation to the figure of Alexander). The last part of this long chapter is a discussion of several episodes that can convey divergent meanings. Among many thought-provoking points (such as whether there was a "real" nuclear disaster or not, or whether time was actually reversed by Alexander's "sacrifice"), the interesting question is raised of whether the world has actually been "saved" because of Alexander's prayer and sacrifice (through God's grace) or because of Maria's – presented as a "witch" – supernatural intervention (323–324). Judiciously, while exploring thoroughly the different hermeneutic options and their implications, the author does not offer any definitive interpretation.

The third part (339–426), "enjeux théologiques", takes the film as inspiration to explore various theological issues specific to the second half of the 20th century, relating to themes such as images, eschatology, apocalypse, and sacrifice. Here, the goal is not to analyze or explain the film but to reflect on broader questions arising from the film at the intersection of cinema and theology. The author offers elaborate theological discussions, for example on love and reason (409–415), that can certainly be of interest for someone specializing in (practical) theology.

The whole study is extremely detailed and provides a solid guide to the interpretation of religious or spiritual themes in *THE SACRIFICE* and in Tarkovsky's work more generally. One aspect might deserve further research (maybe in a follow-up study): while a Christian hermeneutic framework is largely justified by numerous explicit references to Christian symbols, one might wonder if, at times, this is not too narrow. There are indeed a number of possible non-Christian sources of inspiration for elements that can be characterized as "spiritual" – a crucial notion that deserves a more precise contextualization, and sooner (in the introduction) rather than later (362–366). As the author notes, there are Japanese themes running throughout the movie (the tree, the Japanese flute in the soundtrack etc.). They can be an invitation to analyze them not only as foreign cultural traits but also as allusions to Zen Buddhist (the idea of



renunciation, the monastic ideal) and Taoist notions (explicitly suggested by the yin-yang print on Alexander's robe in the last scenes, and a possible echo to the ecological concern that pervades the film), at least as imagined by a Russian director working in the second part of the 20th century. In addition, there would be ample space to develop a discussion about how the film might (or might not) reflect non-institutional and alternative forms of religion, such as Theosophy or Anthroposophy (the criticism of western materialism, the notion of a soteriological quest). In any case, *THE SACRIFICE* is both marked by an impressive number of discrete influences and lends itself to various interpretations. It can and probably should be considered a "myth" for modern times, questioning existential matters in a time of crisis.

On a more formal note, I would like to underline the quality of expression and the careful editing. However, even if it is evident that the reader is meant to watch the film while reading the book, the reproduction of a few film stills related to major scenes would have been particularly welcome. Similarly, since this is a dense work, dealing with a great variety of topics, a thematic index would have been a useful addition.

These minor reservations notwithstanding, the present volume offers a rich and detailed analysis of *THE SACRIFICE* as well as a solid theoretical framework to explore the interface of film and religion – a framework that will, one hopes, inspire further studies of the same genre on other filmic corpuses.

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Richard Goodwin

## Book Review

### Kutter Callaway with Dean Batali, Watching TV Religiously

Television and Theology in Dialogue. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016, 288 pp., ISBN 978-0-8010-3073-4

There's a moment on *THE SIMPSONS* (Jeffrey Lynch, US 1994) when Homer, smeared by the media as a sexual predator, begs his children to believe him rather than TV – but the kids waver. Bart explains, "It's just hard not to listen to TV. It's spent so much more time raising us than you have" (to which Homer replies, "Maybe TV is right. TV's always right"). Few would deny that recent generations have been raised by television. At a time when it is more likely to be streamed "on demand" using a 5.8-inch screen than watched on the family television set at the time of broadcast, TV remains a significantly formative feature of 21st-century life. Is the formative power of TV something to bemoan and resist? Or might there be genuine theological value there – a medium through which, perhaps, even God may be encountered? These are the questions that animate *Watching TV Religiously*, a compelling, comprehensive look at TV in which theologian Kutter Callaway and screenwriter Dean Batali argue not only for discerning theological engagement with the pervasive medium, but also for the possibility that it may occasionally serve as the site for the Spirit of God's transformative work in the viewer's life.

"'Conversation[s] about God' ... are regularly happening both on TV and among TV viewers", write Callaway and Batali. "Our hope is to chart a path for Christians to join this theological conversation in ways that are as constructive as they are life-giving" (6). And the sophistication with which the authors approach this conversation is decidedly fresh. Rather than focus solely on content, this book is concerned with how TV "is already functioning 'theologically'" (6). As such, Callaway and Batali examine the medium with respect to not only form, but also "process" (i.e. production) and "practice" (i.e. reception). Moreover, they understand TV itself as more than mere "text" (actually, the writers prefer the more dynamic term *trace*, less tethered as it is to a literary paradigm and more evocative of TV shows' amorphous quality); television is simultaneously technology, narrative, commod-

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ity, and ritual (22–35). The net result is a study interested not so much in theology on TV as in a theology of and (to a lesser extent) *through* TV.

Chapters 1–3 seek to understand TV on its own terms, asking first how to define TV (a surprisingly complex task, thanks to technological developments that have given the designation “TV” an “increasingly symbolic” function [22]), before dedicating significant space to developing the analytical tools essential for televi-  
sual “literacy”. Chapters 4–7 are more directly theological, exploring the telos of TV, historic Christian approaches to the medium, TV as mediating God’s revelatory presence, and, finally, consideration of ethics. The structure reflects the method: TV first, theology second. This is not to say that theology is subordinated to TV – not at all! – but simply that in the subtitled dialogue between TV and theology, the authors’ “primary impulse is to listen rather than speak, to set aside our own agendas and presuppositions for the sake of honouring our conversation partners” (13). Granting methodological priority to TV is presented as an act of Christian hospitality and as a more realistic approach for a post-Christendom culture in which Christian theology can no longer assume it has the first word (15).

Though certainly a work of legitimate scholarship, *Watching TV Religiously* is fun and even funny – appropriately enough for a book about a medium largely associated with leisure. For example, the writers use the analogy of a jury to explain the internal workings of the TV writers’ room and claim that this analogy is an allusion not to the film 12 ANGRY MEN (Sidney Lumet, US 1957) starring Henry Fonda (or the eponymous play), but rather to a derivative episode of HAPPY DAYS (Jerry Paris, US 1978). In defence of this claim, they write facetiously that “this is a book about TV, so on these pages, Mr. Fonzarelli’s coolness trumps Mr. Fonda’s” (72). And to express their skepticism about the findings of a Netflix-funded study into viewers’ binge-watching habits, they sarcastically quip, “This of course is a completely trustworthy statistic. As everyone knows, human beings never attempt to mislead others about their unsavoury behaviors” (19). Batali’s day job as a TV comedy writer has apparently informed the tone – and the book is the better for it. Humour aside, the writing style is down-to-earth. There are no instances of scholarly obfuscation, no intractable tangles of clunky academic prose. Instead, the writing is lucid and elegant – the way academic writing should be. It is one of the most accessible theological texts I have ever read, understandable to a wide range of readers in a manner befitting a populist medium.

The style, however, does not compromise the substance. The book is weighty and insightful. One of its key strengths, already alluded to, is the holistic way in which it comes at the topic, engaging TV in terms of, yes, “text” – or, better, *trace* – but also of process and practice. Regarding process, Batali’s contribution is invaluable. His career as a TV writer yields useful insights into how TV shows are written. Perhaps even more helpful, I think, is the focus on audience reception. To my mind, elaborate scholarly “readings”, however clever they



may be, are no more important (and are arguably less so) than the coding, interpretations, and appropriations in which viewers *actually* engage.

Another strength is the emphasis on aesthetics. Theological engagement with screen media has historically had a tendency to skip over formal analysis, proceeding directly to “literary” elements like plot, character, and theme.<sup>1</sup> But what and how an artwork “means” is inextricably bound up with style. Chapter 2 seeks to equip readers with the ability to appreciate television at this stylistic level, discussing form in terms of structure, sights, and sounds. That the authors prioritise aesthetic engagement yields deep insights into meaning. For example, the examination of *HOUSE OF CARDS* (Beau Willimon, US 2013–), a series still in production, scrutinises the theme music for clues about where the show might be headed, its *telos*. Though the show’s protagonist, Frank Underwood, seemingly gets away with murder and indeed is even rewarded for his nefarious behaviour, the conflicting major and minor modes of the theme music suggest that his “ultimate fate has already been sealed... Frank’s demise will come, but when and how remain to be seen” (198). Actor Kevin Spacey’s dismissal from the show in the wake of allegations of sexual misconduct (events that have only transpired since the book’s publication) has likely complicated the task of bringing the show to a conclusion, but, if anything, these sordid real-world revelations will probably only add weight to the downfall of which Callaway and Batali detect hints in the theme music. Of course, this meaning, derived as it is wholly from stylistic analysis, would elude commentators concerned only with discursive elements like plot and character.

To my surprise, some of the most fruitful analyses were of sitcoms. *FRIENDS* (David Crane and Marta Kauffman, US 1994–2004) and *PARKS & RECREATION* (Greg Daniels and Michael Schur, US 2009–2015) form the basis for a discussion of character growth and empathy. To preserve the comic potential inherent in recalcitrantly opposing personalities, the former show neither depicts nor encourages substantial character development. The latter show, however, is that rare (unique?) breed of sitcom that finds humour in selfless friendships. Even the fairly vanilla *THE BIG BANG THEORY* (Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, US 2007–) is similarly shown to represent a distinctive vision of human community in which long-suffering, self-sacrificial care for the other enables collective flourishing. Why did I find this profundity surprising? Because the genre, especially in its most conventional versions, is usually considered to be among the fluffiest of TV fare – right up there (almost) with soaps and reality TV. The genius lies in the attention paid not just to individual episodes but also to whole seasons and indeed entire series. This, I think, is a more realistic understanding of how audiences are actually shaped by the television medium. While the formative impact

<sup>1</sup> Johnston 2007, 19–20.



of an individual episode may be minimal, the cumulative effect of living with a particular TV show over months or years is bound to be more significant.

This brings us to one of the most important contributions of the book, namely its discussion of the presence of the Spirit of God in the ritual practices of TV consumption. The optimistic take on the capacity of screen media to occasion the Spirit's transformative activity will come as no surprise to those familiar with Callaway's earlier work on film music, *Scoring Transcendence*.<sup>2</sup> But here that notion is developed specifically with respect to the ritualisation so characteristic of the medium. Building upon the anthropological insights of Augustine, the authors advocate for a shift from a transmission view to a ritual view of communication (144). They then turn to the work of James K.A. Smith to demonstrate the power of ritual formation. The authors part ways with Smith slightly over the nature of desire; rather than seeing human passions as neutral and prone to misdirection, as per Smith, they prefer the more optimistic view of fellow-theologian William Dyrness that holds those passions to be potential sites of the Spirit's activity (151). From there, the authors draw upon the revised take on general revelation advanced by Robert K. Johnston, in which "God's wider presence" may be encountered in cultural artefacts and practices, like television (156). Callaway and Batali thus layer these theological resources to construct a robust argument for the possibility of the Spirit's presence and activity in the ordinary patterns of TV viewing that typify contemporary life.

Ordinarily, the discussion of ethics in this sort of book would hold minimal appeal for me. Not that ethics are not important – on the contrary, they are essential – but, in some cases, such conversations can feel a bit like a youth-group talk, aimed at the immature or just the plain puritanical. But, true to form, Callaway and Batali's treatment of the ethics of TV watching is far more generous, ambitious, and nuanced than most. They deliberately and explicitly move beyond the "big three" of content (sex, swearing, and violence) to consider ethical matters that are less obvious but potentially more insidious (166). Much of what they advocate boils down to the active avoidance of the silos and echo chambers that have become part-and-parcel of the modern, highly personalised mediascape. To that end, they point out the problematic nature of TV news that amounts to little more than entertainment (and the prophetic value of satirical news shows that expose it); the importance of diverse representation on TV; and the need to "curate" TV viewing habits to counteract the inevitable confirmation biases that arise when consuming an exclusive diet of "recommended for you" suggestions generated by Netflix algorithms.

Thanks to its accessibility and comprehensiveness, this book would be an ideal assigned text for classes on theology and television or required reading

<sup>2</sup> Callaway 2013.

for classes on theology and popular culture. That being said, it focuses almost exclusively on US TV, and will thus be most relevant in an American educational setting. Even for readers outside the United States, however, it is a valuable resource, both because of American TV's global reach and because it serves as an exemplary model that could be adopted and adapted for theological engagement with the medium in other contexts.

Callaway and Batali are hopeful that “this book will spark constructive conversations that are at least as fun, enlightening, and meaning-filled as the conversations that surround so many of our favorite television shows” (17). Mission accomplished. *Watching TV Religiously* is winsome and thought-provoking. But this work goes further still, aiming to foster a mode of cultural engagement appropriate to a time in which the Western church finds herself increasingly on the cultural margins. The authors write, “The most theologically faithful thing to do is not to demand that the broader culture (and TV in particular) demonstrate... radical transformation as a precondition for our engagement... but to set aside our own interests in order that we might co-labor with culture” (208). This statement could be taken as the book's *raison d'être*: to equip the church to be, to use their James Davison Hunteresque phrase,<sup>3</sup> a “long-suffering presence” amidst a not-yet-transformed people – who happen to really like TV (208). I can think of no better book for the task.

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<sup>3</sup> Hunter 2010.





Dietmar Adler and Charles Martig

## Festival Review: 71<sup>st</sup> Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland, 1–11 August 2018

Religion, Politics, and Transcendence in New Cinema – Highlights One Year after #MeToo

Religion is once again a robust topic in international filmmaking. Several films in the competition at the 71st Locarno Film Festival (1–11 August 2018) dealt explicitly or implicitly with religion, politics, and transcendence. Outstanding films were *A LAND IMAGINED* (Yeo Siew Hua, SG/FR/NL 2018), which won the Golden Leopard, and *M* (Yolande Zauberman, FR 2018), which deals with child abuse in a strictly Orthodox Jewish community and was awarded the Special Prize of the International Jury. The Ecumenical Jury of *Signis* and *Interfilm* decided to award its prize to *SIBEL* (Guillaume Giovanetti / Çağla Zencirci, FR/DE/TR 2018), the story of the emancipation of a young woman in Turkey. In general, women played a prominent role in the festival's program, not least because a pledge of gender parity was signed by festival officials, a sign of where we are one year after #MeToo. In this festival review, Dietmar Adler from *Interfilm* and Charles Martig from *Signis* offer a taste of the film program at Locarno, explore religious, political, and social aspects of the films, and provide insight into the work of the Ecumenical Jury.

### THE WINNER FROM SINGAPORE

The Asian film *A LAND IMAGINED*, directed by Yeo Siew Hua, was considered an extraordinary elaboration of its topic by both the International Jury (it won the Golden Leopard) and the Ecumenical Jury. The film is set in Singapore, where migrant workers labor on land reclamation sites. A worker demands his wages and disappears. Another one, Wang, is killed. It was he who had discovered the body of the other worker. Only Lok, an honest policeman, starts looking for the missing worker: a dreamlike non-logical storytelling starts into a film-noir mystery. The film shows how dependent the migrant workers are: they cannot return to their home countries, they are indebted to their employer, and, moreover, they don't have their passports. The film uses the aesthetic conventions of dreams and internet games to blend time and space through artistic

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editing. Thus, Wang dreams that Lok will investigate his murder. The Ecumenical Jury recorded, “This is the pretext for a reflection on the meaning of borders, national sovereignty and economic exploitation in a globalized world, as well as on the real possibility of solidarity between people from different places and cultures.”<sup>1</sup> Yeo Siew Hua’s victory at the festival was perhaps surprising for some, but if we look back at earlier years of the festival we see that Asian cinema has always been very strong in the competition.

## YOUNG WOMEN AS THE FOCAL POINT OF THE FESTIVAL

The international competition included great portraits of women. Five of the 15 films have a female first name as their title. Carlo Chatrian, who was artistic director of the Locarno Film Festival until 2018 and has now taken up that role for the Berlinale, was asked during a conversation with the Ecumenical Jury whether the film selection followed programmatic guidelines concerning gender equality. He responded that this was simply how it had turned out: the program was developed gradually, and the main criterion was always the quality of the film.

SIBEL, by the Turkish-French directors Çağla Zencirci and Guillaume Giovannetti, the winner of the Ecumenical Jury Prize, was also awarded the prizes of the International Federation of Film Critics *Fipresci* and the Youth Jury. Sibel (Damla Sönmez) is in her mid-twenties. She lives in a village in the Turkish Black Sea region, a mountainous, green area where the people grow tea. Sibel does not speak, but she is not deaf. She communicates with the help of a whistling language that has been used in the valleys of this region. Sibel is different, and she is marginalized in the village because of her impairment. But because Sibel is different, she also has more freedom than other young women in the village. Sibel spends a lot of time in the woods, looking for a mysterious wolf. There she meets Ali, who is hiding in the woods. At first they fight, but later, when Ali looks at Sibel, she transforms from an “it” into a woman. Conflicts in her family and the village follow, but Sibel has changed. She raises her gaze, is self-confident, emancipated, and able to empower other women.

Another portrait of a female adolescent, YARA (Abbas Fahdel, LB/IQ/FR 2018) takes place in the beautiful, almost paradisiacal mountains of northern Lebanon, quite different from the images of the country we see in the news. Yara (Michelle Wehbe) is a young girl who lives with her grandmother somewhere between heaven and earth. She meets Elias, and a carefree, almost shy love sto-

<sup>1</sup> Statement of the Ecumenical Jury; for the English text see <https://www.inter-film.org/auszeichnungen/18181818/commendation-ecumenical-jury-locarno-2018> [accessed 14 August 2018] and for the German see <https://www.inter-film.org/de/auszeichnungen/18181818/lobende-erwaehnung-der-oeumenischen-jury-locarno-2018> [accessed 14 August 2018].



ry begins. But paradise is threatened when Elias tells her that his father wants to take him to Australia to give him a better chance in life. Migration always means that people are left behind. And when somebody is left alone, even the most beautiful landscape is no longer paradise.

A number of the films in the competition accompany young women in their search for identity, for a space opposite men, parents, and groups. *DIANE* (Kent Jones, US 2018), by contrast, is the portrait of an aging woman (Mary Kay Place). The film was awarded a special mention by the Ecumenical Jury. In a plot that spans several years, Diane is shown as she deals with her life. She reviews her relationships, interacts with her son, who is first an alcoholic and then a Christian fundamentalist. She accompanies a cousin in her last phase of her life and is involved in charity work in a soup kitchen. Between her encounters, Diane drives through the winter landscape of Massachusetts, a image of New England different from one we might know. In the winter of her life, Diane discovers new facets of her personality. Glimpses of transcendence appear.

## FEMALE BODIES CONTROLLED BY RELIGION

*#FEMALE PLEASURE* (Barbara Miller, CH 2018) accompanies five women from five major religious traditions. The director shows their struggle for a self-determined sexuality and for the equal and respectful coexistence of men and women. The film portrays the lives of Deborah Feldman, Leyla Hussein, Rokudenashiko, Doris Wagner, and Vithika Yadav and their commitment to enlightenment and liberation in a hypersexualized, secular world.

One of the women, Doris Wagner, lived for a long time in the fundamentalist Catholic community “Das Werk”, where she was abused by a priest. While this story is not representative of the Catholic Church, it shows the fatal consequences of abuse of power and disregard for female identity in a religious community. The documentary by Miller, which was shown in the *Semaine de la critique* and won an award in this section of the festival, claims to portray major religious traditions and their tendency to oppress the female body. It does not succeed equally well for all five women and traditions. Limiting the representation of Islam to genital mutilation in Africa is a strong reduction of a rich tradition. The portrait of the Japanese Rokudenashiko is not really consistent with Buddhism or Shinto. Nevertheless, the basic message of the film is strong. Miller shows that changes in issues such as sexism and abuse are only possible when women and men work together to find new forms of cooperation.



## POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

The films in the competition approached the political dimension in quite different ways. While the Singapore-based story of *A LAND IMAGINED* portrays the fragile status of migrant workers from China and Bangladesh and exposes the abyss of a desolate existence, other films are more ideologically specific. In *SIBEL*, the authorities call the outcast Ali a “terrorist”, a designation that appears to have become customary in Turkey. He should be expelled from the territory or locked away, but Sibel enters into a relationship with him and discovers a compelling attraction. This film opens up a larger reflection on the topic of terrorism. But *SIBEL* was not the only film in the festival program to tackle this subject.

Real terrorists are the topic of the German competition entry *WINTERMÄRCHEN (A WINTER’S TALE)*, Jan Bonny, DE 2018). A trio strongly reminiscent of the right-wing terrorist group National Socialist Underground loses itself in aggression against each other, sex in different constellations, and murdering sprees against migrants. But the film does not even attempt a political analysis of these phenomena and it does not offer anything that would make the characters and their actions understandable beyond a reference to the 25-year-old song “Schrei nach Liebe” by the band Die Ärzte, which is quoted at the end of the film in an acoustic version: “Your violence is just a silent cry for love.” The film was therefore the most ambivalent contribution to the competition.

## M – CHILD ABUSE IN THE STRICTLY ORTHODOX MILIEU OF JUDAISM

Director Yolande Zauberman has found a fascinating character in Menachem Lang. In her documentary *M*, she accompanies the young man on his way to reconciliation with his parents and his Jewish community, a small group of Yiddish-speaking Haredim in Israel. Menachem has had a very difficult life. As a child, he was raped several times, and when he made these events public, he was expelled from the Haredi community in Bnei Berak near Tel Aviv. Since then he has been desperately searching for his identity and his parents’ home.

The film manages to penetrate this forbidden world. Thanks to Menachem’s willingness to enter into dialogue, strictly Orthodox men open up for conversations in long night scenes. The further the film progresses, the deeper the abyss becomes. Several Orthodox Jews report that they were raped and are now themselves abusing children. The spiral of violence in a closed society becomes visible. The film examines the mechanisms of abuse and violence and generates new perspectives. Menachem meets his parents and in front of the camera speaks with them for the first time in years. The careful and empathetic work of the director allows this to become a sign of reconciliation.

## INQUISITION IN THE STYLE OF THE RENAISSANCE

Opposition to religious authorities is also a strong element in the Italian film *MENOCCHIO* (Alberto Fasulo, IT/RO 2018). The miller Menocchio lives in a village in Friuli, Italy, at the end of the 16th century. He is a charismatic person with significant influence on the inhabitants of his village – greater than that of the priest. His beliefs and convictions are not consistent with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. He calls for poverty and respect for nature. Menocchio testifies with conviction before a court that he does not accept authority and feels himself to be the equal of the Pope. He is close to be burned at the stake when, at the end of the film, he recants. Although he is no longer to die, he is imprisoned for life for his heresies.

Director Alberto Fasulo stages the story of the heretic in an expressive *chiaroscuro* style, with the strong contrasting of light and dark known from Renaissance paintings of the 16th century. Many scenes take place in the prison or at night. Only in court are the images bright, but light does not lead to the truth. The film is based on historical records and reports about the trial, but it also develops a unique view of the protagonist whereby Menocchio becomes a modern, agnostic figure. He thinks for himself and risks his life and the lives of his companions and family to stand up for his own convictions.

## TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE IN A PASSION STORY

In *FIRST REFORMED* (Paul Schrader, US 2017), the American actor Ethan Hawke plays a pastor who experiences a profound existential and spiritual crisis. As an alcoholic, he is harming his health, but he rejects any help. His encounter with a young couple of environmentalists confronts him with this existential abyss, but he also discovers new meaning in his work. He wants to resolve the existential and environmental problems of the world through radical action taken on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of his church, the historically significant First Reformed community in New York State.

With his transcendental style, Paul Schrader provides a strong film in *FIRST REFORMED*. At the presentation of the film in Locarno, Ethan Hawke stated: “A film should be like a big bell that strikes you and follows you when you leave the cinema.” Stylistically, director Paul Schrader draws on Bergman and Bresson. *NATTVARDSGÄSTERNA* (*WINTER LIGHT*, Ingmar Bergman, SE 1962) is an important point of reference, with its pastor and the depiction of his existential crisis. Robert Bresson’s *JOURNAL D’UN CURÉ DE CAMPAGNE* (*DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST*, FR 1951) was also an inspiration for this film. With *FIRST REFORMED*, Paul Schrader, a leading American filmmaker, is at his zenith. Ever since his theoretical reflections on the “transcendental style” in the 1970s, Schrader, who is informed by

the Protestant Reformed tradition, has aspired to make such a film. He has provided a surprising and captivating drama which strikes like a thunderbolt and lingers for a long time. This Passion story of a pastor is surprising at an international festival – and staggeringly powerful.

## PLEDGING GENDER PARITY

President Marco Solari and Vice-President Carla Speziali of the Locarno Film Festival signed a pledge to ensure gender parity in programming. The Swiss Women's Audiovisual Network (SWAN) with its director Ursula Meier initiated the pledge. "We are thrilled about this first step towards equality and diversity in festivals. Just as with budget and funding, women are entitled to an equal share of the spotlight and the screens. Visibility of our films is essential", said Gabriel Baur, Laura Kaehr, and Stéphane Mitchell, SWAN's co-presidents, in a statement.<sup>2</sup> Locarno was the first major film festival to follow the initiative taken by the Cannes Film Festival. Alina Birzache and Anna Piazza, members of the Ecumenical Jury of *Signis* and *Interfilm*, were present at the signing event to support this initiative.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Keslassy/Hopewell 2018.



## JRFM 2020, 6/1 CALL FOR PAPERS

### Science Fiction and Religion

Even more than other film genres, science fiction movies confront viewers with societal problems and make experimentation with other models possible. Science fiction can thus be connected to explorations of religion, faith, and belief.

Does a machine (a robot, a computer, an android, or a ship) have a soul? What about the concepts of determinism and free will, the bounds between faith, magic, and experimentation? How do films deal with God and the figure of the saviour, or with prophets, priests, imams, and rabbis? How can ideas of time travel and the afterlife be linked with religious beliefs? How can science be related to faith? What about notions of the future? Why are angels and demons and concepts of good and evil (related to theodicy) so popular in science fiction movies? What is the significance of fictional forms of religion and what is their link to theocracies and dystopian universes?

This issue of **JRFM** analyses and examines these questions by focusing on science fiction in films and TV-series, including both historical and contemporary case studies. It extends the concept of science fiction by also considering fantasy productions. Interdisciplinary approaches to the relationship between religion and science fiction are particularly welcome.

The issue also has an open section for articles on any topic linked to the profile of **JRFM**. Contributions focusing on the use of media in teaching religion and/or discussing the role of media in transmitting academic knowledge in religious studies are particularly welcome.

The deadline for submission is 30 June 2019. Contributions of 25,000–30,000 characters (including spaces) should be submitted online for peer review through the journal homepage, [www.jrfm.eu](http://www.jrfm.eu). We kindly ask authors to register. Publication is scheduled for May 2020. For questions regarding the call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact the **JRFM** office manager ([natalie.fritz@kath.ch](mailto:natalie.fritz@kath.ch)).



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c/o Institute for Fundamental Theology  
Heinrichstrasse 78/B/1  
A-8010 Graz – Austria

[jrfm@uni-graz.at](mailto:jrfm@uni-graz.at)



**SCHÜREN**